

AIM Christian Theology I
BTH205n
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SLCC

PROLEGOMENA: Introductory Matters

The Study of Systematic Theology

Definitions

For the purposes of this class, the term systematic will be typically utilized so as to embrace a potentially more holistic understanding of that which is being studied. For the focus of this class is not exclusively what the New Testament teaches, but rather incorporates the whole of Holy Scripture. And while we are viewing the Scripture through the lense of New Covenant understanding, the term systematic is preferred over Christian simply because the former speaks methodologically, while the latter speaks pre-suppositionally.

This is to say, the phrase “Christian Theology”, says more about the a-priori, or pre-suppositional stances out of which we will operate, than it does of the actual method of our study.

The phrase ‘Systematic Theology’ specifically identifies the method of our approach. The fact that we are Christians, interpreting and approaching Sacred Writ from the framework of the New Covenant is assumed.

Systematic Theology is descriptive then, of that systematized and holistic study which has as its purpose the determination of what the Biblical teaching is on the major subjects of Holy Scripture.

This presupposes a specific methodological approach:

(1st) identifying and interpreting the relevant passages in the Bible on specific topics and
(2nd) summarizing the conclusions reached in a manner that is in harmony with and under the authority of the Scripture itself.

But what is the value or advantage of Systematic Theology over simple Bible knowledge. How is doctrine and theology related? Cottrell suggests that the term “doctrine” refers to the whole scope of Biblical teaching, which may be sub-divided into two categories of theology and ethics.

Theology focuses on what we are to believe; what is true.

2 Timothy 4:3 says, *“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...”*

Titus 2:1 *“But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.”*

Theology then deals with one's belief structure.

Ethics, on the other hand, focuses on what we are to do; what is right.

For example, Titus 1:9,10 says that *"the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."* What is this but a description of proper behavior?

There are then two all-inclusive categories, theology and ethics; right beliefs and right behavior. Both fit under the one umbrella of Doctrine.

The traditional and broad listing of the major Doctrines of systematic theology is as follows:

Doctrine of the Bible	(Bibliology)
Doctrine of God	(Theology)
Doctrine of Angels	(Angelology)
Doctrine of Man	(Anthropology)
Doctrine of Sin	(Hamartiology)
Doctrine of Christ	(Christology)
Doctrine of the Holy Spirit	(Pneumatology)
Doctrine of Salvation	(Soteriology)
Doctrine of the Church	(Ecclesiology)
Doctrine of the Future	(Eschatology)

Systematic Theologizing is the Command of Holy Scripture

All Christians are exhorted to *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* (2 Timothy 2:15; KJV)

Ponder the importance of sound doctrine from the Apostle John's warning. *"Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 1:9; ESV) Again from the KJV, *"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."*

What is he *"teaching of Christ"*, the *"doctrine of Christ"*, but that category of systematic theology called Christology. Observe that here implicitly stated is the prime importance of systematically theologizing about the Biblical teaching concerning Christ; His Person and His Work.

Systematic Theologizing is the example of Christ and the Apostles

Ponder the implication of Paul's words, *"What does the Scripture say?"* in both Romans 4:3 & Galatians 4:30. This same "systematic" approach is clearly implied in the account of Christ

walking with the two on the road to Emmaus.

Jesus, *"beginning with Moses and all the Prophets...interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."* A few verses later Christ said, *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled... Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."* (Luke 24:27, 44-47; ESV)

Observe that Jesus was "identifying and interpreting the relevant passages in the Bible on specific topics and then summarizing the conclusions reached in a manner" that would both harmonize with and be under the authority of the God-breathed Holy Scripture which *"cannot be broken"* (John 10:35). In other words, Jesus was "doing" systematic theology with the disciples.

Systematic Theology is necessary for grounding in truth

Doctrinal error is no less prevalent in our day than in the early centuries. Consider the First Council of Nicea (A.D. 325).

Vitally important was that Council for the Doctrine of Christ; Christology. But how important is this doctrine today?

Do believers today understand the Christological error, even heresy, involved in Mormonism or Jehovah Witness teaching, to use just two examples?

To simply trust in one's tradition and/or superficial Bible reading and teaching, without seeking to plumb the depths of Scriptural wisdom and doctrine, leaves one poorly equipped for the multitudinous *"winds of doctrine"* that blow in every generation. (Ephesians 4:14)

Systematic Theology is the product of a sound epistemology and theology

A sound theology embraces the Biblical teaching on the omniscience of the only wise God.¹ John 3:20 tells us that God *"knows everything"*. Romans 16:27 praises *"the only wise God"*.

To embrace these two concepts is to assume certain things about the revelation God has given in Holy Writ. There should be the anticipation of truth without error, of orderliness and a logical progression of ideas that has internal cohesion, that is it does not logically refute or contradict itself, being the product of an only wise and omniscient (all-knowing) God.

This theological understanding then, affects our approach to the pages of Holy Scripture. We anticipate orderliness, logic, rational thought that builds upon itself and does not contradict. We therefore anticipate being able to categorize and systematize teachings which are on similar topics. And when we have done this we have been engaged in Systematic Theologizing.

Necessary heart postures for a study of Systematic Theology

We should study systematic theology with prayer and the request for wisdom.

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." (Psalm 119:18)

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting." (James 1:5, 6)

We should study systematic theology with humility of heart

"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)

"But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2)

"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." (1 Corinthians 8:1)

"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:4)

We should study systematic theology with sound reason

"Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods?' If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say..." (John 10:31-38)

"Have you never read in the Scriptures?" (Matthew 21:42)

Jesus constantly reasoned with the Jews, on the basis of what the Holy Scripture said. He was a student of the Bible, able to extrapolate from the Sacred Text and make immediate application.

We should study systematic theology in the context of accountability to others who are further down the road of sound doctrine

"What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2)

"Command and teach these things...Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:11-16)

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”
(Proverbs 13:20)

It is expected there will be “faithful men” who will teach within the church. As they have a stewardship to teach, so those taught have a stewardship to listen, learn, gain, deepen and grow.

We should study systematic theology allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture

To learn what the Bible has to say on a given topic, we must have in front of us all those passages that speak to the subject at hand. This requires careful study. “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself,” the *Westminster Confession* reminds us, “and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

We should study systematic theology amidst rejoicing and praise

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes...” (Psalm 19:7-8)

“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97)

The Apostle Paul, at the conclusion of deep doctrinal teaching breaks forth exclaiming... *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”* (Romans 11:33-36)

“O Lord, deepen our love for and hunger for the sacred writings, which are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

GOD’S SELF REVELATION

God is Incomprehensible yet Knowable

“The Christian Church confesses on the one hand that God is the Incomprehensible One, but also on the other hand, that He can be known and that knowledge of Him is an absolute requisite unto salvation.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.29)

“Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.” (Psalm 147:5)

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

“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?” (Zophar in Job 11:7-8)

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.” (Romans 1:19)

Self-Revelation by God is required for all knowledge of God

Berkhof quotes Abraham Kuyper, Dutch Calvinist Theologian, who says, “In the study of all other sciences man places himself above the object of his investigation and actively elicits from it his knowledge by whatever method may seem most appropriate, but in theology he does not stand above but rather under the object of his knowledge.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.34)

Ponder the chasm between God and man

Eternal	temporal
Creator	creature
Infinite	finite
Omnipotent	limited power
Omniscient	limited knowledge
Omnipresent	limited space & mobility
Uncreated	created
Uncaused Cause	effect

With the Fall, man’s inner being was “subjected to corruption” with devastating consequences in all of man’s existence.

Relationally with God...	alienated & fearful
Relationally with Eve...	duplicious & blaming
Psychologically...	shame & guilt
Morally...	disobedient, self-centered & deceitful
In relation to Justice...	doomed
The Created realm...	shattered...“subjected to corruption”
In relation to Truth...	suppresses Truth (Romans 1)

Mankind's Fallen Epistemological Consciousness may be described in four parts:

Fallen Man is the ultimate judge; not God.

Fallen Man denies God and any Divine influence.

Fallen Man believes his thought to be absolutely original with regard to the cosmos or himself. His thoughts come out of himself exclusively.

Fallen Man confronts the facts of the cosmos around him as the product of time plus chance. They are merely brute facts... ultimately irrational.

So not only is there the Creator-creature distinction, the infinite difference between the eternal infinity of the Divine Mind and man's finite understanding, there is also the problem of sin and the Fallen state of mankind.

Sin brings about a futility of thought as the sinner becomes darkened and foolish in his thoughts.

The epistle of Roman describes this condition... *"they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools..."* (Romans 1:21,22) Therefore, Self-Revelation is necessary from the standpoint of who God is because of His transcendent nature; wholly above and beyond us and our thoughts.

Self-Revelation is also necessary from the standpoint of man because of our fallen nature.

Traditionally, God's revelation to man has been categorized into two parts: General and Special Revelation.

Ponder the seminal passage on "*God's revelation to mankind*": Psalms 19

God's General Revelation to all mankind

The Bible testifies there is a general revelation of the Creator in the very cosmos itself. This general revelation is called general in the sense that it is given to all on a universal nature and communicates only general knowledge about God. None may escape feeling the full force, sufficient to His purposes, of that revelation.

General Revelation is that made available to all mankind on the basis of what is seen in the created realm. Calvin called this the *divinitatis sensum*, or "awareness of divinity" residing in all people.

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard." (Psalms 19:1-3)

“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.” (Romans 1:19,20)

“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.” (Romans 2:14,15)

A further delineation was made by the Reformers between Mediate General Revelation and Immediate General Revelation.

Mediate General Revelation is that revelation made by God through the medium of the physical realm external to us. Specifically Scripture says that the created realm declares the glory or character of God, proclaiming His handiwork.

Immediate General Revelation is that revelation made by God through the moral law internal to us. Specifically Scripture declares that His law is written on our hearts giving us, in the words of C.S. Lewis, an inner sense of “*oughtness*”.

Immanuel Kant, German philosopher and last major thinker of the Enlightenment, said there were two things that kept him in awe: “**The starry hosts above and the moral law within**”. Here Kant was describing Mediate & Immediate General Revelation.

Consider the flow of the *God-breathed* thought of Romans 1...

Despite the universal knowledge of God's eternal power and divine nature, man suppresses that very knowledge of the Creator.

For example, consider Bertrand Russell, 20th century philosopher and atheist, who when asked what he would say to God if he found himself before Him, answered: "I should reproach him for not giving us enough evidence."

But observe the clear teaching of Romans one. It is not that people refuse to allow the clear revelation of God in nature into their heads; quite the contrary, the revelation does indeed get through. The basis of the indictment is that while the people know God, they still do “*not honor him as God or give thanks to him*” (Rom. 1:21)...

The problem is that knowledge, as a category, is continually distorted and suppressed, as truth is exchanged for a lie (vv.21-32).

R.C. Sproul gives a brilliant analysis at this point saying, "Not only does God act objectively through his creation, which produces a general revelation of himself, this revelation goes on to produce a natural theology that serves as the basis for the universal guilt of all mankind."

So the real question is not "What will happen to the poor innocent people in the wilderness who never hear the gospel?" The real question is, "How many innocent people are out there in the wilderness?" Scripture says there are none.

This then is the net effect of God's General Revelation of Himself to mankind: Guilt! Certainty that there is a God in heaven, who is all-powerful, coupled with strong internal evidence based on the inescapable reality of the inner sense of *oughtness* that we do not keep, that this God is also both Lawgiver and Judge.

Clearly, mankind left with only General Revelation would have been doomed.

God's Special Revelation

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but 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. (Hebrews 1:1-2 ESV)

The Crucial Nature of God's Word Revelation in Holy Scripture

Paul reminds Timothy that *"from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."* (2 Timothy 3:15, 16)

"Able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"

Surely here is that portion of Divine Revelation so very necessary to mankind's plight.

Fascinating how Psalm 19 depicts the contrast between General Revelation and Special Revelation as it found expression in Holy Scripture.

"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 measuring line 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.

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them

*is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. **12** Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. **13** Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. **14** Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”*

Observe Cottrell’s warning that here “lies one of the most serious points of separation between conservative and liberal theology: Whereas the former affirms word revelation, it is characteristic of the latter to deny it.” (p.48)

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

God’s Word Revelation

INSPIRATION

What does this mean? The Scripture literally says, “God-breathed”. Thus, the newer translations return to the literal rendering of the Greek.

Cottrell succinctly describes the process. “First, God places the message in the prophet’s mind in some way. This is the act of revelation. Second, the prophet delivers this same revealed message to others, either orally or in writing.” (p.50)

This raises the question of how accurate was the message as it was communicated through the human agency. The Biblical answer to this question is theologically framed as **Inspiration**.

Cottrell’s definition is good: “Inspiration is the supernatural influence exerted by the Holy Spirit upon prophets and apostles which enabled them to communicate without error or omission those truths, received through revelation or otherwise, which God deemed necessary for our salvation and service.” (p.50)

What is the Scriptural teaching about Inspiration?

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

- Observe the emphasis on what the Holy Spirit, breathing out through Paul, calls Scripture; “the word of truth”.

John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

2 Peter 1:20-21

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

MacArthur says this...

"Now let me give you a basic definition of the doctrine of biblical authority or inspiration. Just listen to it and then if you want to jot it down I'll repeat it again. Here is how we can sum up the basic doctrine. God superintending human authors so that using their own individual personalities, experiences, thought processes and vocabulary they composed and recorded without error His revelation in the original copies of Scripture. Now I'm going to say that again cause I didn't think you got it all. Okay? Now think it through. God superintending human authors so that using their own individual personalities, experiences, thought processes and vocabulary they composed and recorded without error His revelation in the original copies of Scripture.

Now what that is saying is very simple. God spoke through men without violating their own thought processes and their own vocabulary and yet they were able to produce the Scripture without violating His truth. Now there is a good analogy of this to help you understand it. How could God use human agents without getting a corrupt product? Right? Some people say, "Well, He'd have to dictate it." In other words, He dictated every single word to those guys and they wrote down the dictation. But that does not account for the distinctiveness of the books because each book say Paul or Peter or John or you go to the Old Testament, any writer in the Old Testament, the books carries distinctiveness. They talk about their own experience. They talk even about their own feeling. They use their own vocabulary. If you read say Amos the herdsman of Tekoa, you get a whole different flavor in the writing. You get the flavor of one who is a man of the earth. Whereas if you read the writer of the book of Hebrews you get this very erudite religious highly intense ceremonial sort of sacerdotal approach. If you read Paul, you get a very logical flow. Whereas if you read Peter you get a very impassioned appeal.

And so you see the personality there but if it isn't dictation, how then can God use these human authors without adulterating His Word. And the perfect analogy to that is the virgin birth because in the virgin birth you have God and God is the agency by which the Lord Jesus Christ is born, right? But God brought Christ to earth through Mary, right? Was Mary a sinner? Of course she was a sinner. And yet she gave birth to the Son of God and none of her sinfulness tainted Him whatsoever. And yet He was her child, right? She carried Him in her womb for ninth months, she gave birth to that child. He was in human terms the flesh of Mary. And so you have that as an analogy to the Scripture, whereas God plants the seed in Mary and Mary, fully womaned, gives birth to that child, fully her child, that child yet is not touched with any of the sinfulness or frailty

of Mary...and so the Word of God. God using a human author produces a perfect Scripture untainted by the human instrument He uses, see. And that's basically what we believe to be true about Scripture. And that is in the case of its original copies. Through the years as has been copied and recopied and recopied and recopied and so forth, we know where the copyists have brought into the situation certain errors. Those, by the way, are obvious because of the other utter divine character of Scripture we can pinpoint for the most part where men have wrongly written a word or something like that. So we know that the original autographs were inspired by God.”

(<http://www.gty.org/resources/print/sermons/DOC-1>)

AUTHORITY

God’s AUTHORITY resides in Scripture

Authority in the fullest sense is a personal concept. Can “authority” exist without personhood behind it?

Scripture has God’s authority precisely because it is the Word of God

What did the prefatory words mean, “*Thus saith the LORD*”? This phrase appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament.

It was clearly understood that disbelief or disobedience toward anything a prophet said was disbelief or disobedience toward God Himself! (Deut. 18:19; 1 Sam 10:8; 13:13-14; 15:3, 19, 23)

Grudem says, “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.73)

Ponder carefully what God meant when He spoke Isaiah 66:1-2

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Finally, consider the view of the Bible’s authority that Christ Jesus held

When under the extreme spiritual duress of His temptation in the wilderness He quoted from it saying, “It is written” in response to each temptation.

When under the extreme physical, emotional and spiritual duress of the crucifixion, amidst His anguish He cries out, “*Eli, Eli, lemasabachthani?*” that is, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46), literally quoting the opening words of the twenty-second Psalm.

He forbade the placing of the teaching of man above the Holy Scripture saying, “So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.” (Matthew 15:6)

For Jesus, an appeal to Scripture was sufficient to end the debate. He would say, “*Have you never read?*”... (Matthew 21:16, 42; Mark 12:26)

But Jesus answered them, “*You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.*” And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. (Matthew 22:29-33; ESV)

The crowds who were listening to Jesus’ teaching in the Temple were struck dumb with amazement . It was a profound answer because Jesus used the Torah itself, turning the argument on the tense of the Hebrew verb, “*I am*”.

Jesus built his theology upon even the tense of a verb in a sentence! What are the implications of this for sound essentially literalistic translations? How important are the English words chosen in translation? How important is the very verb tense conveyed in the English translation? **For Jesus, the tense of the verb established the theology of the resurrection of the dead! Do words matter? Does precision with words matter in Bible translation? Does precision of words matter with our speech?**

For Christ, then, the Scriptures held final and lasting authority. He said, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*” (Matthew 5:17)

Ponder the words of F.F. Bruce in his monumental work, *The Canon of Scripture*...

“The status of the scriptures is symbolically acknowledged in various traditions of public worship. Special veneration is paid to the scrolls of the law in a synagogue service as they are carried from the holy ark, where they are kept, to the *bimah*, from which they are read to the congregation. In the liturgy of the Orthodox Church the gospel book is carried in procession, and the reading from it is preceded by the call: ‘Wisdom! All stand; let us hear the holy gospel.’ The veneration thus paid to the gospel book is not paid to the materials of which it is composed nor to the ink with which it is inscribed, but to the Holy Wisdom which finds expression in the words that are read. In the Catholic liturgy the gospel is treated with comparable veneration and the reading from it is preceded and followed by special prayers. In the Anglican communion service the people stand while the gospel is read and when it is announced they commonly say, ‘Glory to Christ our Saviour’, while at its conclusion, when the reader says, ‘This is the gospel of Christ’, they respond, ‘Praise to Christ our Lord.’

In churches of the Reformed order (such as the Church of Scotland and other Presbyterian churches through the world) the first formal action in a service of public worship takes place when the Bible is carried in from the vestry and placed on the reading desk. Someone, of course, must carry it (the beadle, perhaps, or ‘church officer’), but the person who does so has no liturgical significance (even if, in earlier days, he thought it proper to ‘magnify his office’); it is the Bible that has liturgical significance. The Bible is followed at a respectful distance by the minister. And why? Because he is the *minister* – that is to say, in the original sense of the term, the ‘servant’ of the Word. No letters indicating academic achievement or public honour can match in dignity the letters V.D.M., appended to the pastor’s name in some Reformed churches – *Verbi Divini Minister*, ‘servant of the Word of God.’ When the time comes in the service for the audible reading of the Bible, this lesson is underlined by the introductory exhortation: ‘Let us hear the Word of God.’”
(*The Canon of Scripture*, F.F. Bruce, p. 23-24)

INERRANCY

God’s Truthfulness in Scripture

The meaning of Inerrancy

While the term itself is not found in Scripture, the concept clearly is. Inerrancy means that in ‘particulars’ there is no error.

Every word of God proves true (Proverbs 30:5 ESV)

What is fundamentally at stake is “the concept of the absolute truth and trustworthiness of Bible.” (Cottrell, p.57)

Parameters? (1) The issue is not semantics. (2) The issue is not the copies & translations. (3) The issue is not a modern day laboratory precision use of language. (4) The issue is not literalism to the exclusion of symbolism and the figurative use of words. (5) The issue is not the mode of inspiration. (6) The issue is not what church tradition teaches.

The Scriptural Basis for Inerrancy

Major premise: Every word breathed out by God is true (without error)

Minor premise: Every word of Scripture is breathed out by God

Conclusion: Every word of Scripture is true and therefore inerrant

Major premise? Titus 1:2 refers to God “*who cannot lie*” (NASV), or “*who never lies*” (ESV). Furthermore, if God is omniscient, knowing all things (1 John 3:20), then He is incapable of erring and will therefore always speak truth.

Minor premise? 2 Timothy 3:16 asserts this

Conclusion? “If inspiration does not result in inerrancy, then it has no purpose; if there are errors in Scripture, then inspiration is irrelevant and futile.” (Cottrell, p.59)
Consider Jesus’ use of simple logic in John 10:35...

Major premise: No Scripture can be broken.

Minor premise: Psalm 82:6 is Scripture.

Conclusion: Therefore Psalm 82:6 cannot be broken

Observe, first that Jesus uses syllogistic reasoning to establish His truth claim about Scripture. Observe, secondly, that Jesus accepted presuppositionally, as actual truth, the major premise that Scripture cannot be broken. That the Scripture is inerrant was the view of Christ.

Problems with a denial of Inerrancy

May we imitate God and intentionally lie in small matters? Can we really trust God in anything He says? We have made our own minds a higher standard of truth than Scripture. We must also accept the possibility of Scriptural error not only in minor details but also in doctrinal passages as well.

The most foundational problem with a denial of Inerrancy is that it contradicts Jesus. As Sproul says, a denial of Inerrancy is fundamentally a Christological problem. The real problem is with the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

INFALLIBILITY

Here is the difference between the proverbial Forest & the Trees; between looking at the forest versus looking at particular trees in the forest.

Infallibility means that as a whole it cannot, nor shall it fail.

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. (Psalm 119:89 ESV)

*The **sum** of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.*
(Psalm 119:160 ESV)

The Law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul (Psalm 19:7 ESV)

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18 ESV)

If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—
(John 10:35 ESV)

Observations:

- (1) Thus far we have considered four aspects of what the Sacred Text teaches about itself: Inspiration, Authority, Inerrancy & Infallibility.

What is the order in which these flow? Which is the foundation?

Inspiration, the fact that this text is “God-breathed”, is the foundation of all else. But what comes next?

Consider Exodus 19 as the children of Israel were encamped on the plain of sand before Mt. Sinai... which of the three (authority, inerrancy or infallibility) hit them first?

- (2) Understand again that Infallibility speaks of the whole, while Inerrancy speaks of the parts. To ponder Infallibility is to ponder the Forest as a whole. To ponder Inerrancy is to ponder a particular tree in the Forest of Holy Scripture.

The WORK OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 3:15-16

...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...

Makes one wise leading to Salvation (3:15b)

Romans 10:14-17

A clear presentation of the gospel message in words, the words of Scripture, must precede... indeed, will precede saving faith.

Ephesians 5:26-27

God graciously ‘sanctifies’ the church in the spiritual action of ‘washing’ through the agency of the Scripture.

1 Peter 1:23-25

The Lord uses Scripture to bring about life in the believer.

Teaching - #1319 (*Didaskalia*); 3:16a; here is the first encountering of the Gospel message of repentance from sin & faith in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ...

Reproof - #1650 (*Elegchos*); here is verbal rebuke for wrong behavior or wrong belief resulting in conviction.

Correction - #1882 (*Epanorthosis*); “The restoration of something to its proper condition. The word appears only here in the NT, but was used in extrabiblical Greek of righting a fallen object, or helping back to their feet those who had stumbled. Scripture not only rebukes wrong behavior, but also points the way back to godly living. Cf. Ps. 119:9-11” (MacArthur’s Study Bible note)

Training in righteousness - #3809 (*Paideia*); “Originally instruction of children from *pais* (3816), a child. It evolved to mean chastening because all effectual instruction for the sinful children of men includes and implies chastening, correction... In *paideia* there is discipline. See *nouthesia* (3559), instruction mainly by word, while *paideia* is by deed.” (*Zodhiates Lexical Aids to the New Testament, Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*)

Observe that Scripture “provides the comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary for life and godliness. Cf. Ps. 119:97-105.” (MacArthur’s Study Bible note)

How fascinating then to ponder how 2 Tim 3:15 & 16 wondrously describe the Christian life from Gospel confrontation through spiritual maturation.

The DOCTRINE OF GOD

The Names of God

Understanding the names of God constitutes a difficulty of human thought; or He is the Incomprehensible One, infinitely exalted above all creation.

Yet, in His names He descends to the finite realm enabling us to grasp a part of the Divine Reality through the use of analogical language.

What do we mean by analogical language? Univocal, Equivocal & Analogical usages of language...

The Names of God in General

Unger says, “The two essential and personal names of God in the Hebrew Scriptures are *Elohim* and *Jehovah* (more correctly *Yahweh*); the former calling attention to the fullness of divine power, the latter meaning, ‘He Who is,’ and thus declaring the divine Self-existence. The terms are varied or combined with others to bring out or emphasize certain attributes of the Godhead, such variations or combinations being rendered in our English version, ‘God Almighty,’ ‘The Living God,’ ‘The Most High,’ ‘The Lord,’ or ‘The God of Hosts.’” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 409)

Unger continues with a broad definition of God saying, “God as revealed through the Scriptures is the one Infinite and Eternal Being. He is purely spiritual, the Supreme Personal Intelligence, the Creator and Preserver of all things, the perfect Moral Ruler of the universe; he is the only proper object of worship; he is the tri-personal – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constituting one God-head.” (ibid. 410)

Old Testament Names

Names signifying God’s transcendence

El, Elohim, Elyon & Adonai

The following is from *The Doctrine of God*, by Herman Bavinck, Baker Book House, 1951.

“El: the Strong and Mighty One; Eloha, Elohim: the Powerful One or He that is to be feared; Elyon: the High and Exalted One; Adonai: Ruler...”

“The name ‘**Elohim**’ describes the Divine Being in his original relationship and in his continuous causal relationship to the universe. It is a designation of relationship, not a designation of immediate, inner essence. Indeed, it expresses the idea of absolute transcendence with respect to the entire universe.” (ibid, p99-100)

“*Elyon*... designates God as the High and Exalted One; it is used by Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18; Balaam, Num. 24:16; the king of Babylon, Is. 14:14; cf. Mk. 5:7; Luke 1:32, 35; Acts 16:17; and occurs especially in poetry. (ibid, p100)

‘*Adhonay*, Lord, in strengthened form ‘Lord of lords’ and ‘Lord of all the earth,’ indicates God as the Ruler to whom everything is subject, and to whom man is related as a servant, Gen. 18:27...”

“The names discussed so far are not ‘proper names’ in the restricted, limited sense of that term. They are also used with reference to idols, to men, and to the government, Gen. 33:10; Ex. 7:1; 4:16; 12:12; 21:5, 6; 22:7; Lev 19:32; Num. 33:4; Judg. 5:8; 1 Sam. 2:25; Ps. 58:1; 82:1.

Nevertheless, these names are the usual appellatives and designations of the Deity. Moreover, they are Semitic, and indicate God’s transcendence above all creatures. The Semites prefer to call God ‘Lord,’ ‘King.’ They feel deeply dependent upon him. They do not use these names to give expression to philosophic theories concerning the being of God, but emphasize God’s relation to his creatures, especially to man.” (ibid. p101)

***El & Elohim* are typically translated as “God”**

***Elyon* is typically translated as “Most High”**

***Adonai/Adonay* is translated as “Lord”**

Names signifying God’s immanence

Shadday & El Shadday (or Shaddai & El Shaddai)

“Though high and exalted, in transcendence, nevertheless, God condescends to the level of the creature. Not only does he reveal himself through the work of creation to all nations, but in a very special sense he makes himself known to Israel. The first name by means of which, in his special revelation, God makes himself known is *Shadday* or ‘*El Shadday*. As such God reveals himself to Abraham when he makes him a father of a multitude of nations and institutes the sacrament of circumcision as a seal of the covenant, Gen. 17:1 ff.

In the time of the patriarchs this name occurs again and again, Gen. 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Ex. 6:3; Num. 24:4. Furthermore, it is found in Job, in a few psalms, and a few times in the prophets. The N.T. equivalent for the name is *pantokrator*, II Cor. 6:18; Rev. 4:8, the Lord Almighty...

Wherever the name occurs, the idea of power and invincible strength is in the foreground... This name makes God known to us as the One who possesses all power, and is able to overcome all opposition and to make everything subservient to his will.

The name Elohim differs in this respect from El-Shaddai that while the former indicates the God of nature and creation, the latter describes God as subjecting all the powers of nature, and making them subservient to the work of grace. In this name God's 'divinity' and 'everlasting power' is no more an object of fear and terror but a source of blessing and comfort. God gives himself to his people, and his invincible power is for them the guarantee of the fulfillment of his promises and of the fact that he will ever keep his covenant. Hence, from now on God is repeatedly called the God of Abraham, Gen. 24:12; of Isaac, Gen. 28:13; of Jacob, Ex. 3:6; of your fathers, Ex. 3:13, 15; of the Hebrews, Ex. 3:18; of Israel, Gen. 33:20; while Isaiah often calls him the Holy One of Israel. God is the Exalted One, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Omnipotent One, who, nevertheless, sustains a relation of favor toward his people." (ibid. 101-102)

El-Shaddai is translated as God Almighty.

YAHWEH

"It is especially in the name *Yhwh* that the Lord reveals himself as the God of grace. The Jews regarded this name as God's name par excellence, the name descriptive of God's essence, God's proper name, the glorious name, the name of four letters, the Tetragrammaton, etc., and from Lev. 24:16 and Ex. 3:15 they concluded that it is wrong to pronounce that name. In Lev. 24:16 we read, *'And he that blasphemeth the name of Jehovah, he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the sojourner as the home-born, when he blasphemeth the name of Jehovah, shall be put to death.'* In Ex. 3:15 the Jews read, *'This is my secret name'* (lit. *'my name to be concealed'*) instead of, *'This is my name forever,'* seeing that the Hebrew consonants for 'to be concealed' and for 'forever' are the same: they read *le'alle* instead of *le'olam*. Just when this idea arose among the Jews we do not know. We do know, however, that the LXX already read Adonai for Jehovah; hence the translation *Kyrios*...

Because of the Jewish dread of pronouncing this name its original pronunciation was forgotten. The church-fathers called it 'the name that should not be spoken, the ineffable, the unutterable or unpronounceable name,' in all probability not because they themselves held that the name should never be mentioned, but because the Jews were of that opinion, and because the correct pronunciation was lost...

In Ex. 3:13-15 the meaning of the name *Yhwh* is clearly indicated. The full name is *'ehyeh* *'asher 'ehyeh*, which signifies that he who now calls Moses and is about to deliver Israel is the same God who had appeared to the fathers. He is that he is, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Verse 15 indicates the meaning of this name even more clearly; *'Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me (Moses) unto you: this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.'* God does not call himself 'the One who is' in the *abstract*. He gives no explanation of his aseity, but he declares very explicitly what he is and what is his character. Now what is he and what is his character? This cannot be expressed in a single word, but 'he will be that he will be.' Everything is included in this expression; to be sure this qualification is general and indefinite, but that that

very reason it is so rich and so full of meaning: he will be what he has been for the patriarchs, what he is now, and what he will remain: for his people he will be everything.

The One who appears to Moses is not a new or a strange God, but is the God of the fathers, the Unchangeable the Immutable One, the Faithful One, the eternally Self-consistent One, the One who never leaves or forsakes his people but ever seeks his own and ever saves them, who is unchangeable in his grace, in his love, in his succor, who will be what he is, since he ever remaineth himself. Hence, in Isaiah he calls himself: 'I, Jehovah, the first and with the last, I am he,' Is. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 44:6; 48:12. Of course, God's aseity is basic to this conception, but this is not the pre-eminent meaning: the name does not directly convey this idea...

The explanation which we have just given also makes clear whether and in how far the name *Yhwh* was known before the time of Moses. Ex. 6:3 does not tell us that this name was never used before the time of Moses, but that the Lord was not known to the fathers by that name. As a matter of fact we meet with this name again and again before we come to Ex. 6. It constitutes an element in many proper names; e.g., Jochebed ['God is glory'], Ahijah, Abijah, 1 Chron. 2:24, 25; and if it had been a name altogether new and unheard of, the people would not have listened to Moses. For this very reason Moses approached the people in the name of the God of their fathers, Ex. 3:12.

Hence, Ex. 6:3 must mean that the Lord now for the first time made known to Moses the significance and import of this name. The facts sustain this explanation, for before Ex. 3 we nowhere find an explanation of this name such as is given by the Lord himself: here, for the first time God indicates how this name must be interpreted, exactly what it implies. The name, indeed, existed in earlier times when the Lord himself used it more than once Gen. 15:7; 28:13. Already in former days the Lord was invoked by this name, Gen. 14:22; 24:3; 28:16; 15:2, 8; 32:9; but an explanation of it had not yet been given...

Hence, in Ex. 6 the Lord tells us what his name *Yhwh* signifies, entirely apart from its derivation or original meaning. From now on the name *Yhwh* implies and guarantees that God is and remains the God of his people, immutable in his grace and faithfulness. Before the time of Moses this full import of the name could not have been given: a long period of time was necessary to prove God's unchangeable faithfulness: a person's faithfulness is not proved at once but in the long run, especially in seasons of distress. Thus it was in the case of Israel. Centuries had elapsed since the time of the patriarchs. Israel was being oppressed and was in distress. Now God comes and says: 'I am that I am, Jehovah, the One who keepeth faithfulness forever, the God of the fathers, your God also now, and your God forever.' At this time God gives an entirely new meaning to an old name, a meaning which before this time would not have been understood. Hence we read in Hosea 12:9 and 13:4

In the name 'Jehovah' the O.T. revelation of God reaches its culmination: no new names are added. God's 'proper name par excellence' is Jehovah: Ex. 15:3; Ps. 83:19; Hos. 12:6; Is. 42:8...

Abbreviated forms of it, found especially in composition, are *Yah*, *Yahu*, *Yahaw*, whence the substantive *Yah* which occurs independently several times, Ex. 15:2; Ps. 68:4; 89:8; 94:7, 12;

118:14; Is. 12:2; 38:11; Is. 26:4 ('Jehovah, even Jah'), and constitutes an element in the exclamation 'Hallelu-jah.'...

The name Elohim designates God as Creator and Preserver of all things; El-Shaddai represents him as the Mighty One, who makes nature subservient to grace; Jehovah describes him as the One whose grace and faithfulness endure forever; Jehovah Cbha'oth characterizes him as the King in the fullness of his glory, surrounded by organized hosts of angels, governing the entire universe as the Omnipotent One, and in his temple receiving the honor and adoration of all his creatures.

(*The Doctrine of God*, Herman Bavinck, Baker Book House, 1951, p102-108)

Piper identifies seven implications that flow out of the Divine Name Yahweh (*I Am that I Am*):

- (1) ***God exists***
- (2) ***No reality exists behind/before God***
- (3) ***God does not change***
- (4) ***God is an inexhaustible source of energy***
- (5) ***Truth is both objective & absolute***
- (6) ***The creature is subservient to the Creator***
- (7) ***This God has drawn near to us in Christ Jesus***

[summation of John Piper's sermon titled "I Am Who I Am"; found at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/i-am-who-i-am>]

In the N.T. we find the O.T. names retained. "We find the name 'God' as the equivalent of El, Elohim. Elyon is translated 'the Most High,' Mk. 5:7; Luke 1:32, 35, 76; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17; Heb. 7:1; cf. Luke 2:14. The appellative 'the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob' recurs in the N.T., as is true also of the name 'God of Israel,' Matt. 15:31; 22:32; Mk. 12:26; Luke 1:68; 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:32, 46; 22:14; Heb. 11:16.

More often, however, 'God' (theos) is constructed with the genitives 'my,' 'thy,' 'our,' 'your,' for in Christ God is the God and the Father of his people, and of each of his children, Heb 8:10; Rev. 7:12; 19:5; 21:3.

In the N.T. the name Jehovah is explicated a few times by 'the Alpha and the Omega,' 'who is and who was and who is to come,' 'the first and the last,' 'the beginning and the end,' Rev. 1:4, 8, 17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13.

For the rest the LXX is followed, which substituted Adonai for it, which has been rendered 'Lord' (*Kyrios*) in the New Testament, derived from *Kyros* strength. *Kyrios* characterizes God as the Mighty One, the Lord, the Possessor, the One who *legally* exercises authority (in distinction from *despotes* the one who *actually* possesses power), and is used not only of God, but also of Christ.

The N.T. seems to introduce a new name 'Father.' But this name is even applied to the Deity in heathen religions, and it occurs repeatedly in the O.T., Deut. 32:6; Ps 103:13; Is. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal. 1:6; 2:10; while Israel is often called God's son, Ex. 4:22; Deut 14:1; 32:19; Is. 1:2; Jer. 31:20; Hos. 1:10; 11:1.

The name 'Father' expresses the special theocratic relation which God sustains to his people Israel. In a wonderful manner he formed this people out of Abraham. In the more general sense of Origin and Creator the name Father is used in the N.t., in 1 Cor 8:6; Eph. 3:15; Heb. 12:9; Jas. 1:18; cf. Luke 3:38; Acts 17:18. In other places the name is expressive of the deep, ethical, individual relation which in Christ God sustains to all his children, of which the relation which according to the O.T. existed between God and Israel is a type and shadow.

In the N.T. the name 'Father' becomes the common name by which God is addressed. The rendering 'Lord' (*kyrios*) for Jehovah is insufficient. It is supplemented by the name 'Father.' This name is the highest revelation of God, God is not only the Creator, the Almighty One, the faithful One, the King and Lord; he is also the Father of his people.

A kingdom of the Father who is in heaven takes the place of Israel's theocratic kingdom. The subjects are also children; the citizens are members of the family. The N.T. presents to us the complete realization of both righteousness and love, of both the state and the family.

We find here the *perfect* Kingship; for, here is a King who is at the same time Father, who does not force his subjects to obey him; but creates and protects them. As his children they are born of him; they bear his image; they constitute his family.

This relationship has been realized through Christ, the Father's own, only-begotten, and beloved Son. Through the Holy Spirit believers partake of and become conscious of this adoption as children, John 3:5, 8; rom. 8:15 ff. God has revealed himself in the richest manner in the name of 'Father, Son, and Spirit.' There is a gradual unfolding of the fullness which from the beginning was in Elohim, and this fullness has become most gloriously manifest in God's Trinitarian name."

(Bavinck, pp108-110)

God the Father is particularly made manifest in John's Gospel

"While ubiquitous [existing or being everywhere at the same time] in John's Gospel, the notion of God as Father is not a common one in the Hebrew Scriptures. On the whole, 'Father' tends to be applied to Israel as a nation rather than to individual Jews."

But in John's Gospel there are 136 instances of *pater*, of which 120 refer to God.

What is striking is that the instances of the usage of *pater* are in major clusters concentrated primarily in the so-called festival cycle (chapters 5, 6, 8 & 10) and in the farewell discourse (14-16).

Furthermore, virtually all references are found in discourse rather than narration. This strongly suggests that John's 'Father' language is rooted in the very language of Jesus himself.

Further of interest is that 15 of the 38 references to God as 'Father' in chapters 5-10 are clustered in the fifth chapter, verses 17-47; the classic Christological discourse by Jesus Himself.

Eleven references to God as Father are found in the Bread of Life discourse (ch. 6).

The intense debate of chapter eight sees 19 references to God as Father in the face of Jewish claims to the same.

Chapter ten sees Jesus using the trusting caring relationship between a shepherd and his sheep as an illustration of Jesus' relationship with His Father. This reaches a climax when Jesus affirms his unity with the Father saying, *'I and the Father are one'* (10:30; cf. 5:17-18).

"The Jews promptly pick up stones to stone Jesus. Jesus present claim forms the climax of the chapter much as 8:58 does for chapter 8. The statement echoes the basic confession of Judaism, *'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one'* (Deut 6). For Jesus to be one with the Father yet distinct from him amounts to a claim to deity (cf. 1:1-2). To be sure, the emphasis here is on the unity of their works, yet an ontological (not just functional) unity between Jesus and the Father seems presupposed. While not affirming complete identity, clearly there is more in view than a mere oneness of will between Jesus and the Father." (ibid. 67-68)

The densest concentration of references to God as Father is in 14:6-13, where in a span of eight verses Jesus refers to God as Father twelve times.

The 'High Priestly' prayer of Jesus of chapter 17 exudes this eternal Father-Son relationship.

"Summary: Father-Son is the dominant, controlling metaphor used for Jesus' relationship with God in the Fourth Gospel. The two persons of God the Father and the Son are thoroughly and inextricably intertwined. Jesus derives his mission from the Father and is fully dependent on him in carrying it out. The imagery of 'Father' and 'Son' plainly draws on Jewish cultural expectations related to father-son relationships, especially those pertaining to only sons. The vast majority of instances of *pater* in John's Gospel are found in discourse material. Emphatically, it is Jesus himself who refers to God as 'the Father and in close to twenty instances even as 'his' Father. 'The Father' is Jesus' natural, almost unselfconscious, way of referring to God. Particularly prominent are references to the Father's sending of Jesus."

(Father, Son & Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel, Kostenberger & Swain. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008; 73-74)

SUMMARY: In the name 'Jehovah' the O.T. revelation of God reaches its culmination... The N.T. seems to suggest a new name 'Father'. Ponder the Gospel of John. Thus there is a gradual unfolding of the fullness which from the beginning was in Elohim, and this fullness has become most gloriously manifest in God's Trinitarian name.

GOD THE CREATOR

Observe that Scripture begins with this ‘truth claim’ immediately after the pronouncement of God’s existence. “*In the beginning **God created the heavens and the earth...***” (Genesis 1:1)

Accordingly, the two earliest Creeds affirm the same:

The Apostle’s Creed: “*I believe in God the Father, **Maker of** heaven and earth...*” (earliest written version A.D. 215)

The Nicene Creed: “*I believe in one God the Father Almighty, **Maker of** heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*”(A.D. 325)

Thus, the macro-view of the ‘forest of Holy Scripture’ is of two grand ‘particulars’: Creation & Redemption; or the God of Genesis 1 & 2 and the God of Genesis 3 thru Revelation 22; or God the Creator & God the Redeemer.

Immediately, it becomes clear that without an understanding of God the Creator one cannot understand fully God the Redeemer. In other words, Genesis 1-2 precedes Calvary. Even more deeply, Calvary ultimately will one day lead redeemed mankind back to Genesis 1-2. It’s called the New Heaven & New Earth; Eden restored!

Augustus Strong, in his work, *Systematic Theology*, gives a thought provoking definition of Creation.

“By creation we mean that free act of the triune God by which in the beginning for his own glory he made, without the use of pre-existing materials, the whole visible and invisible universe. Creation is designed origination by a transcendent and personal God, of that which itself is not God. The universe is related to God as our own volitions are related to ourselves. They are not ourselves, and we are greater than they. Creation is not simply the idea of God, or even the plan of God, but it is the idea externalized, the plan executed; in other words, it implies an exercise, not only of intellect, but also of will, and this will is not an instinctive and unconscious will, but a will that is personal and free. Such exercise of will seems to involve, not self-development, but self-limitation, on the part of God; the transformation of energy into force, and so a beginning of time, with its finite successions. But, whatever the relation of creation to time, creation makes the universe wholly dependent upon God, as its originator.” (p.371)

Jack Cottrell in his book, *What the Bible says about God the Creator*, suggests three basic ideas in the Scriptural assertion of Creation: (1) God created the universe out of nothing; (2) creation as a free act; (3) creation is inclusive of both the spiritual and the material realms.” (p.97)

“According to Christian Doctrine, God alone is eternal. The system or systems of the material universe, as well as matter itself, also spiritual beings, except God, had a beginning. They were absolutely created, made ‘out of nothing,’ by the power of the Almighty will. The first sentence of the Apostle’s Creed is to be taken in its broadest and deepest sense, ‘I believe in God the

Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” (*Think Biblically*, John MacArthur, Chapter 3, pages 55-84)

Consider the concept of Creation out of nothing

The Latin expresses thusly, *Creation ex nihilo*. Here is the idea that God created without the use of preexisting material.

“Thus as a means of bringing something into existence, creation is opposed to both generation and formation. Generation is the process of bringing something into existence out of one’s own being, as in pantheistic emanation or human procreation. In this case the preexisting material is the ‘creator’s’ own self. Formation is the act of a craftsman who makes an object out of raw material available from some other source, as in the case of Plato’s Demiurge or a human sculptor. The Christian doctrine of creation in its primary and most specific sense denies both of these alternatives. The universe – including both its spiritual and its material content – was not generated out of God’s own essence, nor was it formed out of a mass of eternally-existing matter. It was created out of nothing.” (Cottrell, p.97)

Consider again the concept of Creation out of nothing...

“Out of nothing” is not intended to imply a category of “stuff” called “nothing”. “Out of nothing” means to be “not out of anything”. In other words, before creation God was all there was. Infinite in His eternality, power, knowledge & presence He was all there was. There was no dimension of ‘stuff’ in which he existed. The triune God was, outside of His inner Trinitarian relationships, the only thing, the only substance, the only entity that existed. There was nothing else. If by ‘dimension’ we mean that context or environment in which an entity exists, then it is philosophically stunning to ponder yet accurate to assert that God is His own dimension. There was, nor could there be, anything outside of Him. He alone is eternal. There is no primeval soup in which He existed out of which he created. All such thought is eastern dualist in its essence.

Henry Morris in his book, *The Genesis Record*, says the following...

Speaking of Genesis 1:1 he says, “This one verse refutes all of man’s false philosophies concerning the origin and meaning of the world:

- (1) It refutes atheism, because the universe was created by God.
- (2) It refutes pantheism, for God is transcendent to that which He created.
- (3) It refutes polytheism, for one God created all things.
- (4) It refutes materialism, for matter had a beginning.
- (5) It refutes dualism, because God was alone when He created.
- (6) It refutes humanism, because God, not man, is the ultimate reality.
- (7) It refutes evolutionism, because God created all things.

He goes on to summarize, “all such false philosophies are merely different ways of expressing the same unbelief. Each one proposes that there is no personal, transcendent God; that ultimate

reality is to be found in the cosmos itself; and that the development of the universe into its present form is contingent solely on the innate properties of its own components. In essence, each of the above philosophies embraces all the others. Dualism, for example, is a summary form of polytheism, which is the popular expression of pantheism, which presupposes materialism, which functions in terms of evolutionism, which finds its consummation in humanism, which culminates in atheism.” (Morris, p.38)

R.F. Weidner, writing in his book *Theologia, or The Doctrine of God* (1902) preceded Morris with the following words concerning Genesis 1:1.

“This simple sentence denies *atheism*, for it assumes the Being of God. It denies *polytheism*, and among its various forms, the doctrine of two eternal principles, the one good and the other evil – for it confesses the one eternal Creator. It denies *materialism*, for it asserts the creation of matter. It denies *pantheism*, for it assumed the existence of God before all things, and apart from them. It denies *fatalism*, for it involves the freedom of the Eternal Being.” (p.80)

But let us think a bit more tightly about the “how” of creation. Consider what John MacArthur has to say here:

“How did God do this? What was His method? He spoke...He spoke...He spoke it into existence out of nothing. This is...this is God. Psalm 33:6 and 9, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth for He spoke and it was done, He commanded and it was established." That is the psalmist's affirmation of the Genesis account of creation. God said, "Let there be...let there be...let there be..." and every time He said it there was. This is what we call fiat creation, He willed it and spoke it into existence. Psalm 148:5 says, "He spoke and they were created."

This is where everything came from. It didn't exist. God willed it to exist. He spoke and it came into existence. That is the divine account of creation. In Mark 13:19 it talks about the beginning of the creation which God created...just in case somebody might question. And you have that all through the New Testament, the emphasis on the fact that God created. Matthew 19:4, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" Again and again the Scripture makes reference to God as creator. Romans 1, says, it's so evident that God is the creator that if you don't see it you're without excuse. Colossians, that great first chapter, verse 16 where it says, "By Him all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created by Him and for Him." That sums it up. That is always the biblical, the New Testament and Old Testament, affirmation of God as creator. Hebrews 1:10, "And Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the works of Thy hands." I mean, Scripture just continually affirms God as the creator and He created simply by willing it and then speaking it into existence.

Listen to Romans 4:17, this is another testimony. It says, "As it is written, a father of many nations have I made you, in the sight of Him of whom he believed, even God...and here is the definition of God...God who gives life to the dead...listen to this...and calls into being that which

does not exist." That's Romans 4:17. Creation is God calling into existence what does not exist. There's no room in that for evolution. Evolution is something appearing that has mutated from something else. That's not creation.

At a particular point in eternity the eternal God spoke everything into existence, made up of components which had never before existed. Therefore we say the material, space-time-universe, had an absolute beginning, not some kind of relative beginning. And the plain...going back to Genesis, the plain meaning of Genesis 1:1 is frankly not arguable, it's unmistakable. "In the beginning God created everything...everything."

St. Augustine wrote in his Confession, "***For You created them from nothing, not from Your own substance or from some matter not created by Yourself, or already in existence, but from matter which You created at one and the same time as the things that You made from it since there was no interval of time before You gave form to this formless matter,***" end quote.
[emboldening & italics mine]

There was no pre-existing material. And nothing is in existence that God didn't create. John 1:3, "All things came into being by Him and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." There isn't anything that exists that God didn't create. That's a very, very clear Scripture." (from John MacArthur at <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/sermons/90-211>)

But does the text support this concept of 'creation from no pre-existing material'; i.e. out of nothing?

First, consider that the term "in the beginning" is without qualification. Thus, it must be referencing the beginning point of all things.

Second, consider the Hebrew term *bara*, translated "created." This Hebrew verb is in the Qal perfect form (or completed action). As such, it is used only of divine activity.

Cottrell says, "Basically the *qal* form of *bara* refers to a new and extra-ordinary act, the initiating of something new. As such it is the Hebrew word closest in meaning to creation from nothing. Scheffczyk makes another statement which is essentially correct:

'The term *bara* so forcefully conveys the Creator's independence of any other creative principle that this text (Gen. 1:1) has usually been taken to imply a *creatio ex nihilo*; and though such a concept is not formally expressed here, it is quite consistent with the text...'

Thomas E. McComiskey expresses the same thought: The limitation of this word to divine activity indicates that the area of meaning delineated by the root falls outside the sphere of human ability. Since the word never occurs with the object of the material, and since the primary emphasis of the word is on the newness of the created object, the word lends itself well to the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, although that concept is not necessarily inherent within the meaning of the word."

Dr. E.J. Young acknowledged this limitation, but he asserted that the use of this term, in view of its pregnant meaning, along with the expression ‘in the beginning,’ can only be taken to mean creation *ex nihilo*.” (Quotation from Cottrell, p.107; Citations quoted by Cottrell were as follows: Leo Scheffczyk, *Creation and Providence*, tr. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p.6... and Thomas E. McComiskey, “*bara*’,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris et al. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), I:127.

Cottrell again says, “A third consideration from Genesis 1:1 is the reference in the next verse to a ‘formless and void’ earth. Pohle suggests that verse one speaks of the initial act of creation, and verse two speaks of the result, namely, matter in a chaotic, unformed state. Thus if the creation involved use of preexisting matter, then we are told that God fashioned unformed matter out of unformed matter. But this seems irrational. ‘Consequently, the original production was strictly a creation out of nothing.’ This point assumed that Genesis 1:1 chronologically precedes verse two, and is not simply a summary statement of everything that follows up through Genesis 2:4. Even if it is the latter, it is difficult to exclude the notion of an initial creative act preceding the existence of the unformed state in verse 2. Hence the argument has some force.

The conclusion is that creation from nothing is strongly suggested by Genesis 1:1-2.” (Cottrell, p 107-108; Citation quoted by Cottrell was from Joseph Pohle, *God: The Author of Nature and the Supernatural*, ed. Arthur Preuss. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1912, p. 8.)

Three New Testament passages explicitly speak on the creation:

John 1:3

“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”(ESV)

“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (NASV)

The NASV’s translation of the Greek *ginomai* is more precise than the ESV’s. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says, ‘to come into existence, begin to be, receive being.’

Cottrell is sound here when he says, “Without *ex nihilo* origination, the things which ‘came into being’ would have been in a real sense just as much ‘in the beginning’ as was the *Logos*; and the whole point of the passage – the exaltation of the *Logos* – would be undermined.” (ibid. p109)

Hebrews 11:3

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (ESV)

“By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” (NASV)

The word here translated “made” is *ginomai*. While some would suggest that here is a denial of creation *ex nihilo*, the reasoning is not sound. For if this passage does teach that all visible things were made from invisible things then we have a contradiction of John 1:3. Philosophically we also then have Dualism in which there is a realm or dimension of invisible stuff out of which God created the visible world. Such faulty interpretation quickly descends into serious error. James Buswell gives a good tight translation: “By faith we understand that the cosmic processes were set in order by the word of God, so that not from things which put in an appearance did that which we look upon come into being.” (James O. Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962, I;136)

Romans 4:17

“God... who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” (ESV)

“God... who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.” (NASV)

In this passage two things are said of God. He is the one who gives life and He is the one who calls into existence things that did not previously exist.

Cottrell is tight in his summary here: “There is no more forceful statement of creation from nothing in the Bible, or anywhere.” (ibid. 109-110)

Cottrell continues, “Pohle says that the expression ‘that which does not exist’ must mean absolute non-existence, ‘since the divine ‘call’ signifies an omnipotent fiat, in virtue of which Being... emerges from the abyss of non-being.’” (Cottrell, p.110; Pohle, p.16)

Consider the explicit Scriptural teaching of creation by God’s simple fiat or word of command. While John 1:3 cites the agency God the Word Psalm 33:6 & 9 also speaks to this:

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” (ESV)

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” (NASV)

To summarize:

“What is clear from this and the other biblical testimony is that creation was an act of origination, an absolute beginning point when God brought into existence without the use of any preexisting materials the whole created universe. This is creation *ex nihilo*.” (Cottrell, p. 112)

Consider now the implications of Creation

[The following is a summarization of Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Creator*, chapter four]

1. Matter is good

Here is a refutation of Gnosticism, Hinduism's concept of *Maya* & all such metaphysical religions such as Christian Science.

Observe that the source of evil is ethical, not metaphysical. (Cottrell, p 145)

2. Matter is contingent

3. Nature, the Cosmos, is dependable

4. Science is therefore possible and legitimate

5. Mankind is wholly a creature

"To say that man is a creature means two things: he is finite but good." (ibid. 152)

There is no spark of divinity intrinsic in man

6. Mankind has legitimate God-ordained purpose & meaning

Particularly is this true in light of being made in God's image.

7. History is linear and not cyclical

8. The Creator is to be worshipped because He is the Creator

9. Ethics & Morality are transcendentally rooted

Unger's Bible Dictionary, pages 225-226, says...

"True doctrine upon this subject is both theoretically and practically of fundamental importance;

- (1) In relation to God, whose eternal greatness and majesty can be felt by us only when we conceive of Him as 'before all worlds' and the Creator of all.
- (2) Here, first of all, true religion establishes its claim upon us; for He who has created us and all things may rightfully require our worship and service.
- (3) In the creation we find also a true revelation, and he who recognizes this must admit the possibility and even the probability of more particular revelations. The objection to miracles in connection with revelation vanishes when one begins by accepting the miracle of creation.
- (4) This doctrine underlies all true repose of faith; for only when we apprehend the broad and wholesome teaching of the Scriptures upon this subject can we fully commit ourselves unto God 'as unto a faithful Creator.'"

“If God is the Creator of the entire universe, then it must follow that He is the Lord of the whole universe. No part of the world is outside of His lordship. That means that no part of my life must be outside of His lordship.” (R.C. Sproul)

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The question of classification

The Incommunicable Attributes of God (God as the Absolute Being)

SELF-EXISTENCE

Definition: *“This means that God has the ground of His existence in Himself, and unlike man, does not depend on anything outside of Himself. He is independent in His Being, in His virtues and actions, and causes all His creatures to depend on Him. The idea is embodied in the name Jehovah and finds expression in the following passages, Ps. 33:11; 115:3; Isa. 40:18 ff.; Dan. 4:35; John 5:26; Rom. 11:33-36; Acts 17:25; Rev. 4:11.”* (Summary of Christian Doctrine, Berkhof)

The idea of God’s self-existence was historically expressed by the term *aseitas*, meaning self-originated. While this captures accurately the idea that God is independent in His Being, Reformed theologians generally substituted for it the word *independentia* (independence), so as to express that God is independent in everything else.

In other words, He does not need, in a necessary sense, the created realm for anything. From all eternity the Triune God was infinitely self-sufficient in all possible ways. This self-existence of God finds expression in the name Yahweh or Jehovah.

Consider Christ’s assertion of this very thing in John 5:26. *For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*

God’s ground for existence is Himself. God exists by virtue of His very nature as uncreated, without origin, Being. In the Divine language, He is the One *“Who was, Who is and Who is to come.”*

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

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

The Triune God has had perfect love and fellowship and communication within the Godhead from all eternity past.

And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:5, 24)

In this attribute we see the qualitative difference between God and the created realm. He necessarily exists forever.

Yet as stunning as this is, the Scriptures balance this with the stunning revelation that we and all creation can glorify God and bring Him joy!

“...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (Isaiah 43:7)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

Ponder the bottom line that without the Divine Attribute of God's Self-Existence, *reality cannot be explained*. For if anything exists (and it does), there must be a self-existent something! We are then faced with the choice between a self-existent eternal cosmos or a self-existent eternal Creator God.

IMMUTABILITY

Definition: *“Scripture teaches that God is unchangeable. He is forever the same in His divine Being and perfections, and also in His purposes and promises, Num. 23:19; Pa 33:11; 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:17; Jas. 1:17. This does not mean, however, that there is no movement in God. The Bible speaks of Him as coming and going, hiding and revealing Himself. He is also said to repent, but this is evidently only a human way of speaking of God, Ex. 32:14; Jonah 3:10, and really indicates a change in man's relation to God.”* (Summary of Christian Doctrine, Berkhof)

“Immutability is one of the Divine perfections which is not sufficiently pondered. It is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a rock (Deut 32:4, etc.) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state; even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. Because God has no beginning and no ending, He can know no change. He is everlastingly “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17).” (*The Attributes of God*, Arthur W. Pink; 1886 – 1952)

Logic instructs us that any change in God, Who is Absolute Perfection would necessarily involve either improvement or deterioration. Both are equally impossible.

The great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck says, *“The doctrine of God’s immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture God is often called the Rock...”* (The Doctrine of God, Herman Bavinck, p.149)

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

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. (James 1:17)

The sometimes alleged **Impassability of God**... Chapter 2 of the Westminster Confession of Faith says that God is “without...passions.

Yet, this goes beyond what Scripture teaches, contradicting in fact, many clear passages: God rejoices (Isa. 62:5), grieves (Psalm 78:40), His wrath burns against His enemies (Ex. 32:10), etc...

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS ESSENCE
GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS ATTRIBUTES
GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS COUNSEL

Consider the words of Arthur W. Pink in His book, *The Attributes of God*:

“Herein is SOLID COMFORT. Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God can! However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, God changes not. If He varied as we do, if He willed one thing today and another tomorrow, if He were controlled by caprice, who could confide in Him?

But, all praise to His glorious name, He is ever the same. His purpose is fixed, His will is stable, His word is sure. Here then is a rock on which we may fix our feet, while the mighty torrent is sweeping away everything around us. The permanence of God’s character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises: ‘For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed’, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.’ (Isa 54:10)

Herein is ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER. “What comfort would it be to pray to a god that, like the chameleon, changed color every moment? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that was so mutable as to grant a petition one day, and deny it another?” (Stephen Charnock, 1670)...

Herein is TERROR FOR THE WICKED. Those who defy Him, who break His laws, who have no concern for His glory, but who lived their lives as though He existed not, must not suppose that, when at the last they shall cry to Him for mercy, He will alter His will, revoke His word, and rescind His awful threatenings. No, He has declared, “Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them” (Ezek 8:18). God will not deny Himself to gratify their lusts. God is holy, unchangingly so. Therefore God hates sin, eternally hates it. Hence the eternality of the punishment of all who die in their sins.

‘The Divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of His threatenings, as well as the performance of His promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to His frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchanging in veracity and purpose, in faithfulness and justice.’” (John Dick, 1850)

ETERNALITY

Definition: *“That perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present.”* (Systematic Theology, Berkhof, p. 60)

Grudem says, “God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.” (ibid. p.168)

God is in no way limited or confined to this time-space universe. God is timeless in His own Being.

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)

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ (Revelation 4:8)

Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. (John 8:58)

Grudem says, “The study of physics tells us that matter and time and space must all occur together: if there is no matter, there can be no space or time either. Thus, before God created the

universe, there was no ‘time,’ at least not in the sense of a succession of moments one after another.” (ibid. p.169)

God sees all time equally vividly. *“For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.”* (Psalm 90:4)

God alone is the One who knows and declares events before they occur. *“Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.”* (Isaiah 45:21)

Yet, God sees events in time and acts in time!

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4-5)

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

OMNIPRESENCE or IMMENSITY

Definition: *“That perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being.”* (Systematic Theology, Berkhof, p.60)

In view here is both a negation and affirmation. Negatively, Scripture teaches that God is not in any way limited by space. Positively, Scripture teaches that God is infinitely transcendentally above space and yet fills every part of space with His whole Being.

Stunning to ponder the full implication of Genesis 1:1. For if God created the universe, He Himself is not contained within nor limited to it. Think on that next time you gaze up at the starry host.

Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. (Deut 10:14; ESV)

God is present everywhere.

Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:24; ESV)

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; ESV)

But God is not limited to space. He is infinite.

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; ESV)

There is the physical realm or dimension and the spirit realm or dimension. But God is not limited to or by either. God Himself is not equivalent to any part of creation or to all of it. The Divine Being is Himself His own realm. He is the Divine realm or dimension. And He is infinite. Who of us can get our mind around that God is therefore both transcendent and immanent.

UNITY

Grudem says, “God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times.” (p.177)

This attribute has also been called God’s simplicity, using the word simplicity in the sense of “not composed of parts.”

A distinction is historically made between the *unitassingularitatis* and the *unitassimplicitatis*. The unity of singularity stresses the oneness and uniqueness of God, the fact that he is numerically one and as such He is unique.

Paul writes to Timothy saying, “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*” (1 Tim 2:5)

The unity of simplicity stresses the inner and qualitative unity of the Divine Being. God is free from division into parts, and therefore free from compositeness. This means that the three Persons in the Godhead are not so many parts of which the Divine essence is composed.

Solomon prayed, “*That all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other.*” (1 Kings 8:60; ESV)

“*Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*” (I Corinthians 8:6; ESV)

“*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*” (Deut 6:8; ESV)

The Communicable Attributes of God

Attributes which describe God's Being

GOD is UNCREATED SPIRIT

Definition: "God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence." (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.188)

Scripture does not give a definition of God. The closest we come is Christ's statement in John 4:24, "*God is spirit.*" Observe that it does not say God is a spirit. He is Spirit.

Paul speaks of Him as "*the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*" (1 Timothy 1:17)

Why is God spirit? Clearly because it is the greatest most excellent way to exist! While He made the angels spirits, and mankind both spirit and physical flesh, in both cases these are created spirits. God alone is uncreated Spirit.

GOD is INVISIBLE

Definition: "*God's invisibility means that God's total essence, all of his spiritual being, will never be able to be seen by us, yet God still shows Himself to us through visible, created things.*" (Grudem, p.188)

Scripture speaks of "*He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*" (1 Tim 6:15-16)

In response to the request by Moses, God said, "*you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.*" (Exodus 33:20)

Ponder that, while in heaven, we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2), and yet never be able to see or know all of God for "His greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3 & John 6:16). He is ontologically His own dimension which no eye may see.

OMNISCIENCE

i.e. The FOREKNOWLEDGE of GOD

Definition: “God fully knows Himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act.” (Grudem, p.190)

Scripture testifies to the knowledge of God abundantly: 1 Samuel 2:3; Job 12:13; Psalm 94:9; 147:4; Isaiah 29:15 & 40:27, 28.

The Lord knows the tiniest of details of our lives (Matthew 6:8; 10:30). He knows our actions and thoughts before they are even spoken (Psalm 139). God knows everything (1 John 3:20), including the future! (Isaiah 46:9-10).

But, does God's knowledge of future events predetermine those events thus taking away freedom of choice? No. The eternal omniscient God is well able to know what choices will be made and then state the future before it happens, yet such statement being made entirely upon His omniscient knowledge of the very real choice the individual would make.

“Foreknowledge and foreordination are not the same thing.” (Ravi Zacharias in an email response to the question of Divine Sovereignty and human responsibility)

Open Theism & Foreknowledge

“C.S. Lewis once wrote, ‘Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow.’ But this is precisely what open theists deny. That is why many would concur with Timothy George, who says, ‘Open theism teaches a sub-Christian view of God that is unworthy of a robust biblical faith. I have no sympathy for this view and this it would be a great mistake for evangelicals to welcome it within the bounds of tolerable theological diversity.’

It is crucial to understand that open theism is not just another intramural squabble among evangelicals. It is not a debate about second-order doctrines, minutiae, or peripheral matters. Rather, it is a debate about God and the central features of the Christian faith. The contributors to *Beyond the Bounds* stand with a growing chorus of contemporary scholars who have made clear what is at stake in this debate. D.A. Carson argues that open theism ‘so redefines the God of the Bible and of theology that we wind up with a quite different God.’ Wayne Grudem contends that open theism ‘ultimately portrays a different god than the God of the Bible.’ And R. Albert Mohler, believes that ‘The very identity and reality of the God of the Bible is at stake.’ Open theism is, at its roots, a question about the nature of God. The essays in this book contend that open theism presents us with a different God – a God compatible, perhaps, with contemporary sentiments, but one who is not the God of the Bible.”¹

¹ John Piper, Justin Taylor & Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, (Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 2003), 13-14.

The Problem of Foreknowledge

Freewill Baptist Scholar & Theologian, Dr. Robert Picirilli says, “How do we reconcile God’s knowledge and decisions in eternity with what we do in time? If God knows what we’re going to do tomorrow, aren’t we going to do that? If God foreknew who would put faith in Christ, do they have any other choice?”

“There is a current movement in theology... called ‘open theism,’ which denies that God knows in advance the free decisions that human beings make... If God knows ahead of time what decision I’m going to make, then that’s the decision I’ll have to make because if I made a different one, God would be wrong! So, in order to protect our freedom, they have taken the drastic step, theologically, of denying that God knows the future! How do we respond to this logical conundrum?”

First, we distinguish between certainty, contingency and necessity. A ‘necessity’ has to be the way it is, for cause-effect reasons. A ‘contingency’ really can be one way or another (or more). It doesn’t have to be the way it is, even though it is that way; any free decision is in this category. A ‘certainty,’ on the other hand, is what was, or is, or will be: a mere fact, in other words.

Note: all events are certainties (facts). Some events are both certainties and necessities at the same time: laws of physics, for example. On the other hand, some events are both certainties and contingencies... But no event is both a contingency and a necessity at the same time.

We all believe that there really are free decisions that are contingencies. We really can choose one way or another on all sorts of things, silly and important, moral and non-moral. Though God knows which we will choose, His knowing does not cause the choices. He knows the choices we will make only if we will make those choices. He can know something in advance without closing the door to other possibilities.

Comparing God’s knowledge to ours may help. While we can’t know the future, we can know the past. I know what suit I put on earlier this morning, for example. Did I have to? Could I have chosen a different one? Sure. Is it certain that I chose this one? Yes. No one would think of saying that since I know as certain that I wore this suit I couldn’t have worn another one because doing so would have made me mistaken! Had I decided to wear a different one, I would know, now, that I certainly wore that one.

In the same way, God’s knowledge of a future fact is not the cause of the fact. Nor does it mean that the fact has to be the way it will be... When contingencies are involved, free decisions will be made by the people involved when the time comes. God’s prior knowledge of those decisions ahead of time no more causes them or closes the door to other possibilities than my knowledge of the past. He knows what choice I will make only if I will make that choice.” (from “Calvinism, Arminianism and the Theology of Salvation – Lecture One: Calvinism versus Arminianism”; Dr. Robert Picirilli; Leroy Forlines Lectures at Free Will Baptist Bible College; November 19-22, 2002)

In a similar vein of thought, Dr. Cottrell asserts, “It is true that foreknowledge means that future events are in some sense certain. But the question is, what makes them certain? The foreknowledge itself? No, foreknowledge does not make things happen or make them certain; it only means that they are certain. What makes them certain is the acts themselves as freely chosen by their subjects, as viewed by God from his perspective of eternity. Certainty is not the same as necessity.” (The Faith Once For All, Dr. Cottrell, p86)

Foreknowledge & Omniscience

Consider the nature of foreknowledge itself. It is part of the incommunicable attributes of God; His infinity. God as the uncaused Being, infinite in knowledge and transcendent to space and time has the necessary attribute of foreknowledge. This foreknowledge is in the nature of prescience; knowledge that is real and certain before that which is known occurs. The wonder of the Creator God’s utter and infinite transcendence beyond time and space.

Consider the relationship between foreknowledge and predictive prophecy. Unless one embraces a strict Cause & Effect modality behind predictive prophecy the only other option is foreknowledge; knowledge before the fact that is not causative.

Scriptural Examples of *proginosko* as “pre-science”

Consider Acts 26:4-5...

“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according...”

The word translated “they have known” is the word in question *proginosko*. The translation must be in line with prescience and not an eternal decree and decision to love or have relationship with. The clear focus of the Jew’s *proginosko* was knowledge about Paul and his life. The point being that *proginosko* can indeed have the simple and plain meaning of prescience; i.e. foreknowledge or knowledge known before the event occurs, yet which in no way causes the event to occur as it will.

Consider again the meaning of foreknowledge in Romans 8:28-30...

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Observe that verse 28 states we have been “called”. Then verse 29 picks up saying, *“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined...”*

There are three interpretations given the term foreknowledge here. The two Calvinist possibilities are:

- (1) foreknowledge equals being called or chosen; and
- (2) foreknowledge equals election or predestination.

The third, and I believe most simple understanding of the term is that of pre-science.

The problem with the two Calvinist options is that both are stated elsewhere in the passage. Furthermore Paul could easily have stated that from eternity past God chose those He would love. Instead Paul used the term which technically means “knowledge held before”; i.e. foreknowledge.

“All who believe that God is omniscient will acknowledge that God knows beforehand who will believe and be justified. This concept is not contrary to fact or Biblical teaching. Nor is there a logical problem with the idea that God knows this beforehand. The clear semantic meaning of *proginwskw* is to know beforehand. Thus, there is no theological, logical, or semantic problem with this interpretation. Interpreters do not tend to resist this view because it contradicts any orthodox Christian belief or contradicts any passage of Scripture but because it might allow for a non-deterministic Soteriology.”

From “The meaning of *Proginwskw*”, Thomas R. Edgar, at
http://72.14.209.104/search?q=cache:1nDMBGEyMm0J:www.chafer.edu/journal/back_issues/Vol%25209-1%2520ar3.pdf+Picirilli+foreknowledge&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=5#6

Wisdom

Definition: “*That perfection of God whereby He applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most.*” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.69)

“The wisdom of God may be regarded as a particular aspect of His knowledge. It is quite evident that knowledge and wisdom are not the same, though they are closely related. They do not always accompany each other. An uneducated man may be superior to a scholar in wisdom. Knowledge is acquired by study, but wisdom results from an intuitive insight into things. The former is theoretical, while the latter is practical, making knowledge subservient to some specific purpose.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.69)

Dutch Theologian Herman Bavinck says, “Wisdom and knowledge are rooted in different capacities of the soul. The source of *knowledge* is study; of *wisdom*, discernment. *Knowledge* is discursive; *wisdom* intuitive. *Knowledge* is theoretical; *wisdom* practical, teleological; it makes knowledge subservient to an end. *Knowledge* is a matter of the mind apart from the will; *wisdom* is a matter of the mind made subservient to the will. *Knowledge* is often very impractical; i.e., not adapted to the common affairs of life, *wisdom* is adapted to life; it is ethical in character; it is the art of proper living; it characterizes the man who rightly employs his great store of

knowledge, and who chooses the best end and the best means for reaching that end.” (*The Doctrine of God*, Bavinck, p.195-196)

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

O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. (Psalm 104:24)

God’s wisdom is such that He is able to use even evil to achieve good. In His goodness He promises to do this very thing in the lives of believers, who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

He promises to anyone who asks of Him, He will give wisdom generously!” (James 1:5)

VERACITY or TRUTHFULNESS

Definition: “*God’s truthfulness means that he is the true God, and that all his knowledge and words are both true and the final standard of truth.*” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.69)

The first part of this definition indicates that the God revealed in Scripture is the true or real God and that all other so-called gods are mere idols.

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (1 John 5:20)

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.(John 17:3)

The second part of this definition indicates that all of God’s knowledge is true and is the final standard of truth. This means that God is reliable and faithful in His words.

The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deut 32:4)

God’s truthfulness means that all of God’s words about Himself and about His creation completely corresponds to reality.

The truthfulness of God means that we can in part imitate Him by striving to have true knowledge about God and about His world.

The truthfulness of God means that we, as His children, should always strive to be truthful. *O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart... (Psalm 15:1,2)*

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Ephesians 4:25)

The truthfulness of God further means that we should love truth and hate falsehood (Exodus 20:16).

“Thus, Scripture teaches us that lying is wrong not only because of the great harm that comes from it (and much more harm comes from lying than we often realize), but also for an even deeper and more profound reason: when we lie we dishonor God and diminish his glory, for we, as those created in God’s image and created for the purpose of reflecting God’s glory in our lives, are acting in a way that is contrary to God’s won character.” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.197)

Attributes that describe God’s Moral Attributes

GOODNESS

'The Goodness of God endureth continually' (Psa 52:1). The goodness of God refers to the perfection of His nature: 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). There is such an absolute perfection in God's nature and being that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better.

'He is originally good, good of Himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature's good is a superadded quality, in God it is His essence. He is infinitely good; the creature's good is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good, for He cannot be less good than He is; as there can be no addition made to Him, so no subtraction from Him' (Thomas Manton).

God is the *summum bonum*, the highest good.

The original Saxon meaning of our English word God is 'The Good.' God is not only the greatest of all beings, but the best. All the goodness there is in any creature has been imparted from the Creator, but God's goodness is underived, for it is the essence of His eternal nature. As God is infinite in power from all eternity, before there was any display thereof, or any act of omnipotency put forth, so He was eternally good before there was any communication of His bounty, or any creature to whom it might be imparted. Thus, the first manifestation of this divine perfection was in giving being to all things. *'Thou art good, and doest good'* (Psa 119:68). God has in Himself an infinite and inexhaustible treasure of all blessedness, enough to fill all things.

All that emanates from God--His decrees, His creation, His laws, His providences--cannot be otherwise than good: as it is written, 'And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Gen 1:31). Thus, the goodness of God is seen, first, in creation. The more

closely the creature is studied, the more the beneficence of its Creator becomes apparent.” (Pink, *The Attributes of God*)

LOVINGKINDNESS

Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD's lovingkindnesses (2617) indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness.” (Lam 3:19-23; NASV)

The ESV translates it frequently as “steadfast love”.

The Hebrew term, *cheded* (2617), usually indicates God's peculiar favor toward His people.

Cheded is one of the most important words in the Heb. O.T. *Cheded*“ is more the attitude of love which contains mercy. The KJV's ‘lovingkindness’ is archaic, but not far from capturing the full meaning of the word. Other definitions are love, benevolence, kindness, good will, favor, benefit, grace, mercy, piety, loyalty, unfailing love, beauty.” (Zodhiates, Lexical Aides)

Cheded stands in close relation to God's covenant (Nehemiah 1:5).

Cheded is the principle of forgiveness, Psalms 6:4; 31:17; 44:26; 109:26; Lamentations 3:22; of grace, Psalm 51:1.

Cheded is the principle of comfort, Psalm 119:76.

Cheded endures forever, Isaiah 54:8, 10.

Cheded is better than life, Psalm 63:3.

MERCY

“God's goodness toward those who are in misery is called compassion or pity; N.T. *eleos*.” (Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, p.206)

Mercy is “the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.72)

“If the grace of God contemplates man as guilty before God, and therefore in need of forgiveness, the mercy of God contemplates him as one who is bearing the consequences of sin, who is in a pitiable condition, and who therefore needs divine help.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.72)

The compassion of God is manifested in His mercy. Sacred Writ says, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction...”* (2 Corinthians 1:3)

The command of God is that we be like Him in His mercy. *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”* (Matthew 5:7) Indeed, praise be to God our Father that *“mercy triumphs over judgment.”* (James 2:13)

LONGSUFFERING

Longsuffering is “the aspect of the goodness or love of God in virtue of which He bears with the forward and evil in spite of their long continued disobedience.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.72)

“God’s goodness manifested in patience toward those who are deserving of punishment is called longsuffering...” (Bavinck, p.207)

This attribute of God’s goodness is simply incredible, in that by exercising it, He is fully aware of the continued rebellion of the sinner, and yet postpones the merited judgment of wrath.

Perhaps the premier statement of God’s redemptive exercise of longsuffering is made by the apostle Paul. He speaks *“of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”* (Romans 3:24-25)

We are to imitate this aspect the Divine Goodness by practicing patience (Ephesians 4:2).

You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:8)

GRACE

Grace is “the unmerited goodness or love of God to those who have forfeited it, and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.71)

“More gloriously God’s goodness is revealed when it is shown to those who have deserved nothing but evil; it is then called grace...” (Bavinck, p.207)

The grace of God is of the greatest practical significance for sinful mankind. Ponder prayerfully the willingness of God from the beginning to accept a substitute in place of the sinner. What if His nature demanded that retribution be poured out on the one actually guilty of the sin?

“God’s grace means God’s goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.197)

Sacred Writ refers to “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10). That which Scripture emphasizes concerning grace, is the utter lack of obligation on God’s part to give it. It is a free, with no connection to justice, action on His part. In fact, it is the very opposite of justice.

This is to say that grace is not just getting what we do not deserve, it is getting the very opposite of what we deserve.

In point of fact, in the accomplishment of redemption, God overturned the stone tablets of justice in a radical act of just yet unjust self-sacrifice. For the perfect One received punishment while the sinful ones received pardon. The perfect One received the opposite of what He deserved, so that the sinful ones could receive the opposite of what they deserve. Amazing grace!

LOVE

“When the goodness of God is exercised towards His rational creatures, it assumes the higher character of **love**...” (Systematic Theology, Berkhof, p.71)

“God’s goodness revealed in self-communication is called love...” (Bavinck, p.208)

Love is that perfection of God in which He eternally gives of Himself to others. Scripture tells us that “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8).

We see evidence of this attribute being active even amidst the Trinity in the High Priestly prayer of Christ Jesus. “*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*” (John 17:24)

The self-giving that characterizes the Trinity is expressed in God’s relationship to mankind, especially sinful man. “In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

HOLINESS

Ontological Holiness

“It is this holiness of God which Otto, in his important work on *Das Heilige*, regards as that which is most essential in God, and which he designates as ‘the *numinous*.’ He regards it as part of the non-rational in God, which cannot be thought of conceptually, and which include such ideas as ‘absolute unapproachability’ and ‘absolute over-poweringness’ or ‘aweful majesty.’ It awakens in man a sense of absolute nothingness, a ‘creature-consciousness’ or ‘creature-feeling,’ leading to absolute self-abasement.” (Systematic Theology, Berkhof, p.73)

In this sense God’s holiness denotes that He is absolutely distinct from and transcendent to His creatures, exalted above them in infinite majesty.

It is this sense that is the basis of His other attributes, for it is this sense that speaks directly of the creature Creator distinction. Holiness is synonymous with divinity. *“The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness...”* (Amos 4:2).

It is this sense of God’s holiness described in the fearful worship that continuously surrounds He Who is seated upon The Throne. Describing the four living creatures, Sacred Scripture says, *“and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’”* (Revelation 4:8)

Ethical Holiness

The fundamental idea of God’s ethical holiness is also that of separation, but in this case it is a separation from that which is evil.

God can have no fellowship with sin. Elihu asserts, *“far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong.”* (Job 34:10)

“The ethical holiness of God may be defined as that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in his moral creatures.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.74)

The holiness of God is revealed in the moral law, implanted in mankind’s heart (Romans 2:14, 15). The essence of it was carved by God Himself upon the two stone tablets.

It is this aspect of holiness which God commands his people to imitate. *“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* (I Peter 1:14, 15)

RIGHTEOUSNESS

The fundamental idea of righteousness is strict adherence to the law. Among men this presupposes a law to which conformity must be made. But though there is no law above God, He Himself, His very nature is the standard by which all law is judged.

Justice manifests itself especially in giving every man his due. The Hebrew terms for “righteous” and “righteousness” are *tsaddik*, *tsedhek*, and *tsedhakah*, and the corresponding Greek terms, *dikaio*s and *dikaio*sune, all contain the idea of conformity to a standard. This perfection of standard is repeatedly ascribed to God in the Scripture; Ezra 9:15; Psalm 119:137; 145:17; John 17:25; Revelation 16:5.

Rectitude

Rectitude is Latin for “straightness, but not applied to material things.”

“In morality, rightness of principle or practice; uprightness of mind; exact conformity to truth, or to the rules prescribed for moral conduct, either by divine or human laws. Rectitude of mind is the disposition to act in conformity to any known standard of right, truth or justice; rectitude of conduct is the actual conformity to such standard. Perfect rectitude belongs only to the Supreme Being. The more nearly the rectitude of men approaching to the standard of the divine law, the more exalted and dignified is their character. Want of rectitude is not only sinful, but debasing.” (*American Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster 1828)

The rectitude of God is that standard of justice that he manifests as the Ruler of both the good and the evil.

On the basis of it He has instituted moral government upon the earth, as Daniel says, “*heaven rules*” and again, “*the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*” (Daniel 4:26, 32)

It is on the basis of the rectitude of God that He has imposed a just law upon man, with promises of reward for the obedient, and threats of punishment for the transgressor.

Distributive Justice

Here is seen God’s rectitude in the execution of the law as He relates to the distribution of rewards and punishments. It is of two kinds.

The first is **Remunerative justice**, which manifests in the distribution of rewards to both man and angels. “It is really an expression of the divine love, dealing out its bounties, not on the basis of strict merit, for the creature can establish no absolute merit before the Creator, but according to promise and agreement, Luke 17:10; 1 Cor. 4:7.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.75)

The second is **Retributive justice**, which relates to the infliction of penalties. Here is divine wrath on sin. Berkhof points out, “It should be noted that, while man does not merit the reward which he receives, he does merit the punishment which is meted out to him.” (ibid. p.75)

Attributes that describe God’s Volitional Attributes

SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereign Will

Definition of Sovereignty: “Supreme power; supremacy; the possession of the highest power, or of uncontrollable power. Absolute sovereignty belongs to God only.” (*American Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster 1828)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will... (Ephesians 1:11)

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. (Revel 4:11)

There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. (Romans 13:1)

God’s sovereignty is simply His absolute lordship, kingship or dominion. *“For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.” (Psalm 97:9)*

The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. (Psalm 103:19)

God’s sovereignty is that He is able to do what He purposes. *“The Lord has done what He purposed... (Lam 2:17).*

“‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I am God. Also henceforth I am he; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work, and who can turn it back?’ (Isaiah 43:10-13; ESV)

God has, by His very nature as God, the potentiality to be the causation of everything. His will could be exercised in perfect obedience to His desire and statement of what will be. Did He not, in the beginning, by His sovereign will, speak the command, *“Let there be...”!* Whom did He consult? Whom did He have to first answer to? As He demanded of Job... *“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7)*

OMNIPOTENCE - Sovereign Power

Closely related to God’s sovereign will is His sovereign power to do what He wills. The theological term used to describe this power is omnipotence.

Omnipotence means God is well able to do all that He wills to do. For who or what would thwart Him?

The rhetorical question is meaningfully asked, “*Is anything too hard*” for God? (Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:27)

As Creator of the entire created realm, God possesses the sovereign will and power to do whatever He chooses. His power is infinite.

However, He cannot do that which would deny His own nature. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13).

The Paradox of Divine Sovereignty & human responsibility

Cottrell says to equate “divine sovereignty with omni-causality is arbitrary and anti-biblical. Instead of causation, the key word for sovereignty is control.” (p.81)

God is in control of everything that happens, as either the causation or the One Who allowed it to happen. All that happens He either causes or allows.

The tension felt here is described by Ravi Zacharias as follows:

“The classic illustration of this in theology is the paradox between the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God. How can God give us the freedom to exercise our own will and still be sovereign over the universe? Western theologians tend to confuse the question by asking which one of the two is binding. The answer is “both are binding.” This is a marvelous paradox that God brings to focus in the crucifixion of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Peter says in Acts, “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (2:23). In the Crucifixion, God Himself was subject to evil men. Peter doesn’t tell us where God’s sovereignty ended and the responsibility of man began; he simply tells us that they are both real.

Another example is the paradox of Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, yet knowing that he would raise him in a moment. The fact that there is both pain and joy at the same time is a paradox and not a contradiction, for the emotions are not mutually exclusive. What about the paradox of faith and reason? Are they mutually exclusive? Absolutely not. God has put enough into this world to make faith in him a most reasonable stance, but He has left enough out to make it impossible to live by reason alone. Such is the paradoxical nature of Christianity, and Chesterton deals with it in extenso in his masterwork, *Orthodoxy*.

Although the human mind is engaged by mystery, we do not in turn know how to *engage it*. In other words, the paradox we encounter in matters of faith is not comfortable because we do not know how to hold the two parts of it in balance. Our compartmentalizing minds want to put everything into a box, and yet the claims of Christian belief are not mutually exclusive. God, in

His divine sovereignty, has given to us liberties and freedoms. Since our sovereign God chose to grant us this privilege, it cannot be something that in any way diminishes His sovereignty. He circumscribes the limits of that freedom such that we cannot violate His sovereign plan and His will, but that does not negate the freedom that we enjoy. Paradox sits uncomfortably on our rational mind, but then so should the Incarnation, since it is the advent of a Person who is proclaimed to be very God of very God while also being very man of very man. How can God be entirely man while still being entirely God? It's a paradox of the highest order...."
(<http://www.rzim.org/publications/jttran.php?seqid=87>)

God's Sovereignty is "The decree of God in His singular plan involving choices and the potential of evil whereby for His good pleasure to His glory He does His own purpose." – Pastor/Author Tommy Nelson

Attributes that describe God's Summary Attributes

PERFECTION

"God completely possess all excellent qualities and lacks no part of any qualities that would be desirable for Him." (Grudem, p.218)

He is absolute perfection (Matthew 4:48; Psalm 18:30, etc...).

BEAUTY

Here is the 3rd of the Three Transcendental Concepts...

"God is the sum of all desirable qualities" (Grudem, p.219)

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)

GLORY

The attribute here described is not that of character. The focus is upon "the created brightness that surrounds God's revelation of Himself." (Grudem, p.220)

O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment... (Psalm 104:1-2)

Scripture speaks of *“He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”* (1 Tim 6:15,16)

So bright is the Divine radiance that John’s revelation describes heaven saying, *“the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”* (Rev 21:23)

Consider the description of the dazzling glory of God in Ezekiel chapter one. *“And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.”*

BLESSEDNESS

“Beatitude, blessedness, is a divine attribute. It is a perfection of God’s being. Blessedness has occupied an ambiguous place within the structure of the doctrine of divine attributes, though. On the one hand, it is a pervasive or summative category for all of the divine attributes. It encapsulates the way God enjoys the possession and exercise of all his perfections. All that God is and all that he does, he is and does blessedly. What God’s attribute of glory is outwardly, his blessedness is inwardly. On the other hand, this comprehensive and summative function of blessedness may have helped lead to its neglect, because it is difficult to focus on a doctrine so pervasive. Rather than being one of the many attributes on the list, it seems to be more like the tone or timbre of all God’s attributes at once.”

[From blog “God is blessed”, by Fred Sanders, at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/scriptorium/2008/04/god-is-blessed/>]

But how could God be eternally blessed if He is fundamentally a singular being as Islam asserts? For does not our existence reveal the deepest levels of human “blessedness” to rest in relationship? How, if God is an undivided singular one, could He be considered ‘blessed’?

Thus, the blessedness of God is grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity. For Divine blessedness is in the eternal & perfect fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit that he has as one God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Ponder the manifested relational mixture of joy, love & glory from eternity past within the Godhead between Father & Son:

*“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with **the glory that I had with you before the world existed**” (John 17:5)*

*“But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have **my joy fulfilled in themselves**” (John 17:13)*

*“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, **to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.**” (John 17:24-26)*

What God the Son describes here in prayer to God the Father is what theologians, based on Scriptural descriptions elsewhere, call the Divine Blessedness.

"Finally, divine blessedness is a doctrine that is especially grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity: it is in the perfect fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit that he is God in three persons, blessed Trinity. Only as such is God *fons salutis Trinitas*: Trinity, the fountain of salvation. Even within the doctrine of the attributes itself, blessedness has been used (by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, and by Johann Gerhard and Michael Polanus in the seventeenth) as the transitional doctrine between the discussions of the one God and the triune God, the tracts *de deo uno* and *de deo trino*. The standard way of handling blessedness, it seems, is at the very end of the divine attributes, as the last step before turning our attention to the Trinity. The blessed Trinity, that is.

Blessedness, it seems to me, should be seen as the interior state of God that corresponds to his outward glory. Since both grace and glory are extended to us in the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit, they both reach back into the eternal being of God. The missions of the Son and Spirit are free actions of God toward the world, and at the other end of these missions are the eternal processions of Son and Spirit, which constitute the blessed life of God."

[Above from article by Fred Sanders at
<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/scriptorium/2008/04/god-is-blessed/>]

“O Worship the King”

O worship the King, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing God's power and God's love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.

O tell of God's might, O sing of God's grace,

Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space,
Whose chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is God's path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, thy power hath founded of old;
Hath 'stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In thee do we trust, nor find thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

THE HOLY TRINITY

Introduction & Definition

“God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.226)

“Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal Persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (*The Forgotten Trinity*, White, pg.26)

The Old Testament’s adumbration of the Holy Trinity

Genesis 1:26, God speaks and says, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*”

What do the plural verb (“let us”) and the plural pronoun (“our”) mean? (See also Genesis 3:22; “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil...”)

Plurality of majesty? Yet there is no other scriptural usage supporting this. Speaking to angels? Yet angels did not participate in the creation, nor was their image under consideration. The best explanation is that here at the beginning of God’s revelation to man is an adumbration leading in the direction of the Trinity. (*The Doctrine of God*, Bavinck, p.256)

Adumbration is from the Latin, *umbra*, a shade. “To give a faint shadow, or slight likeness; to exhibit a faint resemblance, like a shadow.” (*American Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster, 1828)

“The fact that the name *Elohim* is plural in form to be sure does not prove the trinity; nevertheless, the additional fact that the advocates of monotheism never objected to the use of this name proves that the latter is not to be explained as a reminiscence of polytheism, but that it indicates the richness and fullness of the Divine Being.” (*The Doctrine of God*, Bavinck, p.256)

Consider the passages where one person is called “God” or “the Lord” and is distinguished from another person who is also said to be God.

Psalms 45:6-7 - “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions...”

Observe, here that the Scripture gives a description of a king which clearly ascribes to Him divinity calling Him “God” and saying that His throne is eternal.

But then, two separate persons are called God (*Elohim*). What is this but an adumbration of a clear plurality in the Godhead?

Psalms 110:1 - “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” (Psalm 110:1)

In Matthew 22:41-46, Jesus clearly understands David to be referring to two separate persons as “Lord”. But who is David’s “Lord” except God? And who, therefore, is saying to God, “Sit at my right hand...?”

Malachi 3:1-2 - “Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?”

The One speaking, “the LORD” (*Yahweh*), distinguishes Himself from “the Lord whom you seek” (*Adonai*). This strongly suggests two separate persons, both of Whom can be referred to using Divine titles.

Hosea 1:7, records God speaking of Judah and saying, *“I will save them by the LORD their God”*

The first verse of the book opens with the words, *“The word of the LORD that came to Hosea...”* (Hosea 1:1)

Then in verse seven, the same Divine Person, Yahweh, speaks and says, *“I will save them by Yahweh their Elohim.”* But Who is speaking? And does He not refer to another as *Yahweh their Elohim*?

Isaiah 48:12-16, *“Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last. 13 My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together. 14 “Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. 15 I, even I, have spoken and called him; I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. 16 Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.”*

There is a clear subject-object distinction between the One speaking and the *Lord GOD*. Furthermore, a 3rd apparent Person is referenced; *his Spirit*.

The Incarnation: The Unveiling of God’s Triune nature (White, ch 12)

“The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.” (*The Forgotten Trinity*, B.B. Warfield, quoted by White, p.166)

This truth, this reality which has been from all eternity, was revealed in the Incarnation and coming of the Holy Spirit.

“We cannot speak of the doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, if we study exactness of speech, as revealed in the New Testament, any more than we can speak of it as revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written before its revelation; the New Testament after it. *The revelation itself was made not in word but in deed. It was made in the incarnation of God the Son, and the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit.* The relation of the two Testaments to this revelation is in the one case that of preparation for it, and in the other that of product of it. The revelation itself is embodied just in Christ and the Holy Spirit. *This is as much to say that the*

revelation of the Trinity was incidental to, and the inevitable effect of, the accomplishment of redemption. It was in the coming of the Son of God in the likeness of sinful flesh to offer Himself a sacrifice for sin; and in the coming of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, that the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead was once for all revealed to men.” (ibid, p.166-167)

White summarizes, **“The Trinity is a doctrine not revealed merely in words but instead in the very action of the Triune God in redemption itself!”**

And it is this, historically based nature of this revelation that “explains why we don’t find a single passage that lays out, in a creedal format, the doctrine of the Trinity.” (White, p.167)

“We may understand also, however, from the same central fact, why it is that the doctrine of the Trinity lies in the New Testament rather in the form of allusions than in express teaching, why it is rather everywhere presupposed, coming only here and there into incidental expression, than formally inculcated. It is because the revelation, having been made in the actual occurrences of redemption, was already the common property of all Christian hearts.” (ibid., p. 167)

Thus, “what the New Testament is, is the documentation of the religion of the incarnate Son and of the outpoured spirit, that is to say, of the religion of the Trinity, and what we mean by the doctrine of the Trinity is nothing but the formulation in exact language of the conception of God presupposed in the religion of the incarnate son and outpoured spirit.” (ibid., p. 168)

The New Testament’s Trinitarian Passages

Consider some of the passages where all three Persons of the Trinity are named together...

Matthew 3:16-17 says, *“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

Matthew 28:19 says, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”*

Corinthians 13:14 says, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*

1 Peter 1:2 says, *“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood...”*

Statement of the Doctrine of the Trinity (summary from Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*)

There is in the divine Being but one indivisible essence (*ousia, essentia*)

Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God. Furthermore, God is one in His essential being. Here is monotheism. And here the term “essence” is used to describe God as a sum-total of infinite perfections.

Deuteronomy 6:4 says, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”*

1 Kings 8:60 records Solomon praying, *“that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other.”*

Isaiah 45:5-6 records God saying, *“I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.”*

Isaiah 44:6-8 God says, *“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”*

1 Timothy 2:5 likewise affirms there is but one God, saying, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

In this one divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

While human experience enables us to perceive every person as a distinct and separate individual, in God there are no three individuals alongside of and separate from, one another, “but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically, one.”

Here is a danger. When we think in terms of “person”, there is a tendency to bring in concepts of physical limitations that should not be thought of at all when pondering the Trinity.

The word *subsistence* helps here as it points with greater precision to the personal distinctions in the divine Being. White says, “We are talking about the “I, You, He” found in such passages as Matthew 3... While trying to avoid the idea of separate individuals, we are speaking of the personal self-distinctions God has revealed to exist within the one, indivisible divine essence.” (White, p.170)

Ponder the clear statement of John 1:1-2 where it says, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”*

Jesus speaks to God the Father of the glory and love they shared from eternity past before the world was created in John 17:24.

Jesus as our High Priest, making eternal intercession for us, is a divine Person distinct from the Person of the divine Father Who sits upon the Throne. (Heb 7:25)

The distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit, as a divine Person, is clear from numerous passages where He teaches (John 14:26); bears witness (John 15:26); prays on behalf of us (Romans 8:26-27); gives gifts (1 Cor 12:11); is grieved (Ephesians 4:30), etc...

The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three Persons

“This means that the divine essence is not divided among the three persons, but is wholly with all its perfection in each one of the persons, so that they have a numerical unity of essence. The divine nature is distinguished from the human nature in that it can subsist wholly and indivisibly in more than one person... The persons in the godhead have a numerical unity of essence, that is, possess the identical essence... The divine essence is not an independent existence alongside of the three persons. It has no existence outside of and apart from the three persons.” (*The Doctrine of God*, Berkhof, p.88)

“The person of the Father possesses the whole being of God in himself. Similarly, the son possesses the whole being of God in himself, and the Holy Spirit possesses the whole being of God in himself...” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.252)

Berkhof goes on to say, “It is especially when we reflect on the relation of the three persons to the divine essence that all analogies fail us and we become deeply conscious of the fact that the Trinity is a mystery far beyond our comprehension.” (p.88)

God the Father is clearly seen throughout Scripture as deity, beginning with the first verse.

God the Son is affirmed as God incarnate in John 1:1-14. God the Son was eternally fully God.

John 20:28 strongly affirms the deity of Christ when Thomas says, “*My Lord and my God!*” That Jesus neither rebukes nor corrects Thomas is striking given the clear Mosaic prohibition upon blasphemy.

Hebrews 1:3-8 strongly affirms that the Son is the “*exact representation*” (*charakter* – “exact duplicate”) of the nature or being (*hupostasis* – “substance”) of God. The teaching here is clear that God the Son exactly duplicates the “substance” of God the Father as God.

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...” (ESV)

“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...” (NASV)

The Son “is the... *apaugasma* – “effulgence” or “radiance” (shining forth of a light from a luminous body)... of His *doxa*– “glory”... and the *charakter*– “exact image, precise reproduction in every respect”... of His *hupostasis* – “substance, being, exact nature”...”

The eighth verse continues to refer to the Son as “God” attributing the creation itself to the Son... “But of the Son He says, *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” And, You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands.*”

God the Holy Spirit is clearly taught in numerous passages:

Psalm 139:7-8 – *“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!”*

This passage clearly attributes to the Spirit the Divine attribute of omnipresence, a thing not attributed to any created being.

Acts 5:3-4 records Peter saying, *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”*

“The divine Being is one; the divine persons are three. While the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Spirit, each is fully and completely God by full and complete participation in the divine Being. Unless we recognize the difference between the terms *being* and *person*, we will never have an accurate or workable understanding of the Trinity.” (White, p.171)

The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order

“There is a certain order in the ontological Trinity. In personal subsistence the Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third. This order does not pertain to a priority of time or dignity, but only to the logical order of derivation. The Father is neither begotten by, nor proceeds from any other person; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son from all eternity. Generation and procession take place within the Divine Being, and imply a certain subordination as to the manner of personal subsistence, but no subordination as far as the possession of the divine essence is concerned.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.89)

Consider the difference, theologically, between two categories:

- (1) The ontological Trinity, &
- (2) The economical Trinity.

The ontological Trinity refers to the Trinity as it exists in and of itself.

The economical Trinity refers to the operations, workings & differing roles in both creation and redemption within the Trinity.

“We must be very careful to distinguish between relationships *as we observe them outwardly* and the eternal relationship that exists between the persons *inside* the triune nature of God, that is, the *ontological* Trinity.” (White, p.172)

This “certain definite order” is found in the continuous Scriptural statements describing the Father first, the Son second and the Spirit third.

But this has nothing to do with time elements or points of origin. We are not talking about an order of being or time or worth or divinity. The order described is that of relationship.

And to speak of the relationship within the Triune God is to use two primary terms of “*begotten*” and “*procession*”.

But *begotten* has nothing to do with origination. It speaks of an eternal relationship within the Godhead as Father & Son which has always been.

And the Scriptural method of describing the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son is this word “procession” & “sending”.

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. (John 15:26)

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7)

There are certain personal attributes by which the three Persons are distinguished

Though they are all works of the three Divine Persons jointly, creation is ascribed primarily to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Holy Spirit.

The is traditionally called the “economy of the Trinity”, or the different ways the three persons act as they relate to the world and each other for all eternity.

The Holy Trinity in the Creation:

It was God the Father Who spoke the words of power bringing the cosmos into existence...yet... (Genesis 1:1)

It was God the Son, Who carried out these creative decrees (John 1:3; Col 1:16& Heb 1).

It was God the Spirit, Who “hovered” over the face of the waters (Gen 1:2; Psa 33:6)

The Holy Trinity in Redemption:

God the Father planned redemption sending the Son into the world (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Eph 1:9-10).

God the Son obeyed the Father accomplishing redemption for us (John 6:38; Heb. 10:5-7).

Neither God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit died for our sins.

After God the Son sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High (Hebrews 1:3), God the Holy Spirit was sent being poured out on mankind (John 14:26; 16:7).

The work of the Holy Spirit seems to be to complete the redemptive work planned by God the Father and initially secured by God the Son.

The role of God the Father in both creation and redemption has been to plan and direct and send the Son and Holy Spirit.

“It shows us that the Father and the Son relate to one another as a father and son relate to one another in a human family; the father directs and has authority over the son, and the son obeys and is responsive to the directions of the father. The Holy Spirit is obedient to the directives of both the Father and the Son....Thus, while the persons of the Trinity are equal in all their attributes, they nonetheless differ in their relationships to the creation. The Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father, but they are subordinate in their roles. Moreover, these differences in role are not temporary but will last forever; Paul tells us that even after the final judgment, when the ‘last enemy,’ that is, death, is destroyed and when all things are put under Christ’s feet,” *“When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”* (1 Cor 15:28; ESV; Grudem, p.248)

But the question might be asked, “Why?” **Why should the persons of the Trinity take these distinctive roles?** Was it arbitrary? Could God the Spirit have sent God the Father to die for our sins?

It appears clear that from all eternity the role of commanding, directing and sending applies to the role of the Father, after Whom all paternal relationships are patterned (Eph 3:14-15). Likewise the role of obeying, going as sent and revealing God is appropriate to the role of the Son, also called the Word of God. By extension, we conclude that the role of the Holy Spirit is one appropriate to the relationship he had with the Father and the Son from all eternity.

“This truth about the Trinity has sometimes been summarized in the phrase ‘*ontological equality but economic subordination*,’ where the word *ontological* means ‘being.’ Another way of expressing this more simply would be to say ‘*equal in being but subordinate in role*.’ Both parts of this phrase are necessary to a true doctrine of the Trinity. If we do not have ontological equality, not all the persons are fully God. But if we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity. For example, if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally ‘Father’ and the Son is not eternally ‘Son.’ This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally existed.” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.251)

The Great Trinitarian Passage – Matthew 28:18-20

“He could not have been understood otherwise than as substituting for the Name of Jehovah this other Name ‘of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’; and this could not possibly have meant to His disciples anything else than that Jehovah was now to be known to them by the new Name, of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The only alternative would have been that, for the community which He was founding, Jesus was supplanting Jehovah by a new God; and this alternative is no less than monstrous... We are not witnessing here the birth of the doctrine of the Trinity; that is presupposed. *What we are witnessing is the authoritative announcement of the Trinity as the God of Christianity by its Founder, in one of the most solemn of His recorded declarations.* Israel had worshipped the one and only true God under the Name of Jehovah; Christians are to worship the same one and only and true God under the Name of ‘the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.’ This is the distinguishing characteristic of Christians; and that is as much as to say that *the doctrine of the Trinity is, according to our Lord’s own apprehension of it, the distinctive mark of the religion which He founded.*”

(B.B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Baker Book House, 1981, II:143)

Analogies: Useful but Limited

The three forms of water. But no quantity of water is ever all three of these at the same time. They also have differing properties. There is no corresponding part of the analogy to the 3rd affirmation that there is only one God. There is no such thing as “one water”. Finally, the element of personhood is lacking.

Human intellect, will and emotion. But no one of the factors constitutes the entire person. And the parts have differing abilities.

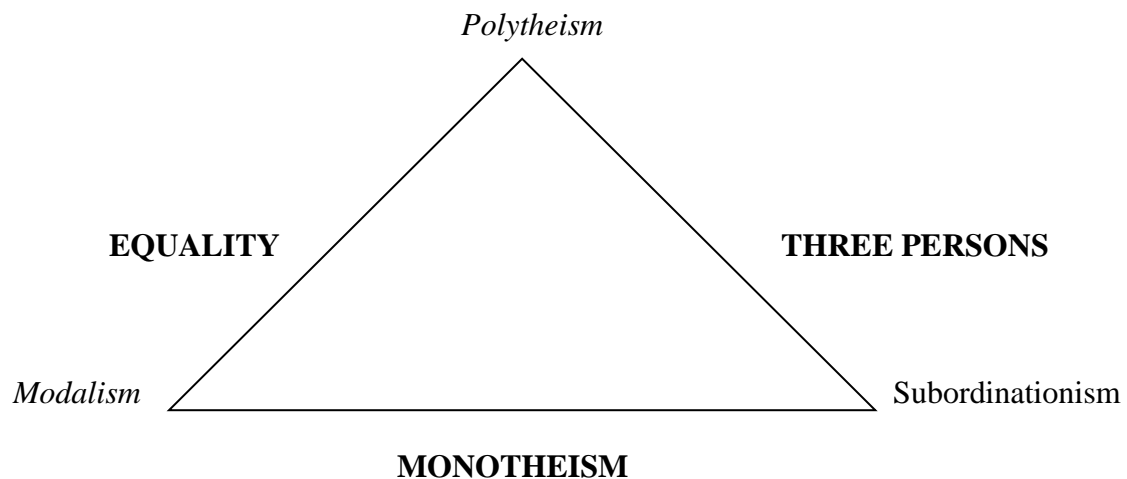
C.S. Lewis's description of 2 dimensional beings encountered by a 3 dimensional being.

Scripture does not set forth an analogy from which to understand the Trinity.

The Triune Existence of God is both Eternal and Necessary

“If all three members of the Trinity are equally and fully divine, then they have all three existed for all eternity, and God has eternally existed as a Trinity (cf. also John 17:5, 24). Moreover, God cannot be other than he is, for He is unchanging...therefore it seems right to conclude that God necessarily exists as a Trinity – He cannot be other than He is.” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.241)

2.3.1.1. Historical Orthodoxy asserts a denial of the Trinity results in heresy



There is only one God (Monotheism)

There are three Divine Persons

These three coeternal Persons are coequal (EQUALITY)

Denial of any one of these three biblical truths leads to serious error that has historically been identified as heresy because it denies the whole counsel of Scripture and nullifies soteriology.

Polytheism denies there is only one God.

Modalism & Arianism deny there are three Divine Persons.

Subordinationism denies that these three Persons are coequal & coeternal.

Modalism: A denial that God is three Persons, yet still embracing the full deity of Jesus

Historically this view was first set forth by Sabellius a theologian & priest in the third century. Sabellianism, also called Modalism, denies the Trinity asserting that God is a single person who, throughout biblical history, has revealed Himself in three modes, or forms. Thus, God is a single person who first manifested himself in the mode of the Father in Old Testament times. At the incarnation, the mode was the Son. After Jesus' ascension, the mode is the Holy Spirit. These modes are consecutive and never simultaneous. In other words, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit never all exist at the same time, only one after another. Modalism thus denies the distinctiveness of the three persons in the Trinity yet retains the divinity of Christ.

Hermeneutical problems with Modalism

There are many passages of Scripture in which the Father, Son & Spirit are spoken of as being together & interacting together as three distinct Persons.

How is **the baptism of Jesus** to be understood?

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."(Matthew 3:16-17)

Cottrell accurately says, "If this is not one person speaking to another, then the narrative or even the act itself is deceptive." (p.254).

And what of **the transfiguration**?

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

Consider the prayers of Jesus...

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me. (John 11:41-42)

And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am,

*there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*²⁷ *“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.* ²⁸ *Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”*²⁹ *The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”* ³⁰ *Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.* ³¹ *Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.* ³² *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* (John 12:23-32)

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10)

Soteriological problems with Modalism

In what sense would Psalm 45 still ring true?

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions... (vss 6-7)

Hebrews chapter 1 uses this to establish the deity of God the Son and consequent superiority to the angels. But if they are not differing persons, one on God's throne and the other anointing the One upon the throne, ought it not to have read, “Therefore You are anointing Yourself...”?

In what sense has God the Son taken His seat at the right hand of the majesty on high as Prophet, Priest & King?

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven... (8:1)

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them... (7:25)

And what of the doctrine of the propitiatory death of God the Son? Remember that propitiation is a blood sacrifice that satisfies wrath. Thus the Scriptures read...

...and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:24-26)

But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering... (Isaiah 53:10)

Modalism raises serious questions about the reality of God's work of redemption.

For in what sense did God the Son declare, '*a body Thou hast prepared for Me...I have come to do Thy will O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book...*' (Hebrews 10)

In what way are we to understand the entire soteriological concept of substitution as in Leviticus 17:11? For the parameters of substitution include God, as offended Deity, providing for Himself the perfect substitutionary Lamb, God the Son, "whom set forth did God for Himself as a propitiation in His blood..." (Romans 3). The entire soteriological infrastructure rests on God the Father, offering in sinner's place, God the Son as a blood sacrifice that satisfies wrath (propitiation; see also Isaiah 53).

Subsequent to His death & burial, God incarnate, as the 2nd Adam, and thus the new Federal Head, was presented before the Ancient of Days (Daniel 9). There He is given the kingdom. There He sits down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. There He is fully God & fully man, eternally, representing & interceding for sinners before a holy God as their Prophet, Priest & King.

If Modalism is correct, the very foundations our salvation rests upon are radically altered.

Arianism denies that God is three Persons, further denying the deity of Jesus

The term Arianism is derived from Arius, Bishop of Alexandria whose views the Council of Nicea condemned in A.D. 325.

Arius taught that God the Father created God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Arianism built its argument on texts that call Christ God's "only begotten" Son (John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Colossians 1:15 further calls Christ "the first-born of all creation". The argument here was that God the Son was obviously brought into existence by the Father.

But Colossians 1:15 is best understood to refer to the rights or privileges Christ has as “firstborn”, not the idea of His being created, an idea flatly contradicted in Scripture at numerous points.

“As for the texts that say that Christ was God’s ‘only begotten Son,’ the early church felt so strongly the force of many other texts showing that Christ was fully and completely God, that it concluded that, whatever ‘only begotten’ meant, it did not mean ‘created.’ Therefore the Nicene Creed in 325 affirmed that Christ was ‘begotten, not made’” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.244)

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

(The Nicene Creed; A.D. 325; revised at Constantinople A.D. 381)

The controversy at Nicea can be identified by two Greek words: *homoiousios* (ὁμοιουσιος), meaning “of a similar substance,” and *homoousios* (ὁμοουσιος), meaning “of the same substance”; two words that differ by a single letter: iota. In fact, in his “History of Christianity,” Edward Gibbon pointed out, with some ridicule, that Christianity was nearly split by the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet.

Arius was content with a creedal statement affirming Christ as similar in substance to God the Father. **Athanasius**, bishop of Alexandria, however, argued and prevailed with the Council that the proper description of God the Son was *homoousios*, or “same substance” with the Father; “very God of very God...being of one substance with the Father.”

Two contemporary and prominent examples of the Arian heresy are **The Watchtower (Jehovah Witnesses)** and **Mormonism**. Jehovah Witness official teaching holds that Christ is Michael the created Archangel. Mormonism believes Him to be the first begotten spirit child of *Elohim* (God the Father), the literal brother of us all (and of Lucifer as well!).

The Athanasian Creed

1. *Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith:*
2. *Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.*
3. *And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;*
4. *Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Substance.*
5. *For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Spirit.*
6. *But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.*
7. *Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit.*
8. *The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Spirit uncreated.*
9. *The Father incomprehensible; the Son incomprehensible; and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.*
10. *The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Spirit eternal.*
11. *And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal.*
12. *And also there are not three uncreated; nor three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated; and one incomprehensible.*
13. *So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Spirit Almighty.*
14. *And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God.*
15. *So likewise the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.*
16. *And yet not three Gods; but one God.*
17. *So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Spirit Lord.*
18. *And yet not three Lords; but one Lord.*
19. *For we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;*
20. *So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion; to say, 'There are three Gods, or three Lords.*
21. *The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten.*
22. *The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten.*
23. *The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding.*
24. *So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.*
25. *And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another; none is greater, or less than another.*
26. *But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal.*
27. *So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped.*
28. *He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.*
29. *Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
30. *For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;*
31. *God, of the Substance of the Father; begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world.*
32. *Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.*
33. *Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood.*

34. *Who although he be God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ.*
35. *One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by taking of the Manhood into God.*
36. *One altogether; not by confusion of Substance; but by unity of Person.*
37. *For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ;*
38. *Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead.*
39. *He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father God Almighty.*
40. *From when he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*
41. *At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;*
42. *And shall give account for their own works.*
43. *And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.*
44. *This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.*

The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity

The atonement rests upon Jesus being fully God and fully man.

Justification by faith alone is undermined by a savior who is less than completely God, hence Divine and able to save without our works.

If Jesus is less than fully God, prayer and worship is eliminated to him.

If Christ, a created being, saved us, then we have attributed salvation to the creature rather than to the Creator.

If the Trinity is false the Independence and Personal nature of God are undermined.

The age old philosophical question of Unity vs. Diversity goes unresolved if there is not, from all eternity, perfect plurality of Persons amidst perfect Unity of Nature within the Holy Trinity.
[The above analysis from Grudem, p.247]

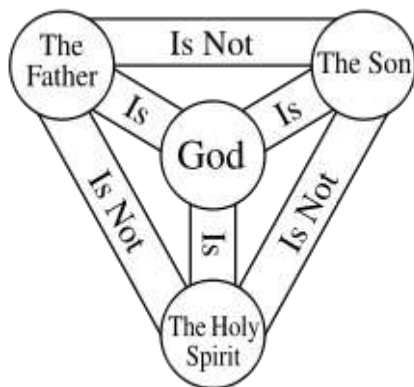
The role of Athanasius at the Council of Nicea

“Athanasius understood better than any of his contemporaries that Christianity stands or falls with the confession of the deity of Christ and of the trinity...The doctrine of the trinity is the very heart of Christianity, differentiating it in principle from Judaism, which denies the distinctions with the Divine Being, and from heathenism which rejects God’s unity...Accordingly, Athanasius completely avoids the philosophical intermingling of ontology and cosmology. He rejects the Gnostic and Arian dualism between God and the world together with all its intermediate beings... Athanasius maintains that the trinity is devoid of all foreign elements; that it is not a union of the Creator and the creature, trinity is eternal. In God there are no non-essential elements. God does not become anything; he is everything eternally. Just as the trinity is from eternity so it is to eternity; hence, Father, Son, and Spirit are from eternity to eternity...” (The Doctrine of God, Bavinck, p.281-282)

The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond man's comprehension

“The Trinity is a mystery, not merely in the biblical sense that it is a truth, which was formerly hidden but is now revealed; but in the sense that man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible. It is intelligible in some of its relations and modes of manifestation, but unintelligible in its essential nature. The many efforts that were made to explain the mystery were speculative rather than theological. They invariably resulted in the development of tritheistic or modalistic conceptions of God, in the denial of either the unity of the divine essence or the reality of the personal distinctions within the essence. The real difficulty lies in the relation in which the persons in the Godhead stand to the divine essence and to one another; and this is a difficulty which the Church cannot remove, but only try to reduce to its proper proportion by a proper definition of terms. It has never tried to explain the mystery of the Trinity, but only sought to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity in such a manner that the errors which endangered it were warded off.” (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.89)

Scutum Fidei “Shield of the Trinity”



Holy, Holy, Holy

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Who was, and is, and evermore shall be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;

Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Doxology

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!
Praise Him all creatures here below.
Praise Him above ye heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son & Holy Ghost. Amen.

“The Trinity”

Three in One, One in Three, God of my salvation, heavenly Father, blessed Son, eternal Spirit, I adore thee as one Being, one Essence, one God in three distinct Persons, for bringing sinners to thy knowledge and to thy kingdom.

O Father, thou hast loved me and sent Jesus to redeem me; O Jesus, thou hast loved me and assumed my nature, shed thine own blood to wash away my sins, wrought righteousness to cover my unworthiness; O Holy Spirit, thou hast loved me and entered my heart, implanted there eternal life, revealed to me the glories of Jesus.

Three Persons and one God, I bless and praise thee, for love so unmerited, so unspeakable, so wondrous, so mighty to save the lost and raise them to glory.

O Father, I thank thee that in fullness of grace thou hast given me to Jesus, to be his sheep, jewel, portion; O Jesus, I thank thee that in fullness of grace thou hast accepted, espoused, bound me; O Holy Spirit, I thank thee that in fullness of grace thou hast exhibited Jesus as my salvation, implanted faith with me, subdued my stubborn heart, made me one with him for ever.

O Father, thou art enthroned to hear my prayers, O Jesus, thy hand is outstretched to take my petitions, O Holy Spirit, thou art willing to help my infirmities, to show me my need, to supply words, to pray within me, to strengthen me that I faint not in supplication.

O Triune God, who commandeth the universe, thou hast commanded me to ask for those things that concern thy kingdom and my soul. Let me live and pray as one baptized into the threefold Name.

(The Valley of Vision, A collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions, Arthur Bennett, ed., 1975, pgs.2-3)

DOCTRINE OF ANGELS

The nature of the Angels

They are created beings; not “Uncreated Being”

Understand the either/or nature of this. Everything is either created or Uncreated. Everything is either contingent or not contingent. Everything is either finite or Infinite. Angels are not God. Angels are created beings made by “The Creator, Who is blessed forever. Amen.”

As created beings, they are immortal, but not eternal. In this sense, they are like mankind, immortal by decree and the power of God, hence, living forever, but with a definitive point of origin.

Nehemiah 9:6 - “You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.” (ESV)

Observe, that the hosts of heaven, in other words, the angelic beings, were part of what was made or created by the LORD.

Colossians 1:16 – “*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*”

Note again, that the realm of the invisible, was created by Him. Clearly, this refers to the angelic realm.

As far as the Biblical data indicates, no creative work preceded the creation of heaven and earth. Hence, the angels were created by God before the 7th day.

Job 38:4-7 records, “*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the*

line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

This may indicate that the angels were present at the founding of the world, but not that they preceded the primary creation itself.

They are spiritual beings without physical bodies

Luke 24:39 says, “*“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”* (Luke 24:39; ESV)

Many may be present in a small physical space; see Luke 8:30.

Colossians 1:16, again, clearly teaches that they are spiritual beings.

While angels from time to time were allowed a bodily form for a specific appearance, they do not ordinarily have physical bodies.

Being created beings, they are incapable of being in two or more places simultaneously. They have spatial limitations, though not exactly like our spatial limitations. They, like us, are finite and therefore limited.

They are rational and moral beings

They are personal beings endowed by God with both intelligence and will. Scripture explicitly teaches that angels are intelligent beings

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” (Matthew 24:36)

The clear implication is that while not omniscient, they are superior to mankind in knowledge.

They are volitionally free beings, with moral obligation.

“And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6)

They are partly good and partly evil. Upon completing the creation, God judged that everything was good. This assessment coupled with the words of Jude 6, and others, lead to the conclusion that at the beginning of creation, the angelic realm, all angels were good; without sin.

The Number and Organization of the Angels

While no definite number is given, Scripture clearly reveals they constitute a mighty army. They are repeatedly called the host of heaven or of God.

“The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.” (Deut 33:2)

“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.” (Rev 5:11)

Many names are used to describe them: “Sons of God” (Job 1:6); “Holy ones” (Psalm 89:5, 7); “Spirits” (Heb 1:14); “Watchers” (Daniel 4:13); “Thrones,” “dominions,” “principalities,” “authorities” (Col. 1:16); “Powers” (Eph 1:21).

Different classes of angels:

Cherubim

Seraphim

The Living Creatures – Ezekiel and Revelation speak of these (Ezek 1:5-14; Rev. 4:6-8). Given their appearance, they seem to be mighty representatives of various parts of God’s entire creation. They worship God continually: “Day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

Gabriel and Michael – These two alone are named in Scripture.

Gabriel appears in Dan 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26. It seems to have been his special task to mediate and interpret divine revelations.

Michael appears in Dan 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7. From the fact he is called “the archangel” in Jude 9, and the expression used in Rev 12, it seems he occupies a primary place among the angels.

The Service of the Angels

Ordinary Service: Praising God day and night (Job 38:7; Isa 6; Rev 5); minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:14); rejoice at conversions of sinners (Luke 15:10); watch over believers (Psa 34:7); protect little ones (Matt 18:10); are present in the Church (1 Cor 11:10); learn from the Church of the manifold riches of the grace of God (Eph 3:10); convey/transport believers to the place of paradise (Luke 16:22).

Extraordinary Service: Mediate special revelation of God, communicate blessings and execute judgments. Their activities seem to be most prominent in the great turning points of the Redemptive plan, such as the days of the patriarchs, the giving of the Law, the period of exile and restoration, the birth, resurrection and ascension of the Lord.

Cherubim

Mentioned repeatedly in Scripture; guarding the entrance to the Garden (Gen 3:24); gazing upon the mercy-seat (Ex 25:18); constitute the chariot on which God descends to the earth (Psa 18:10).

“These symbolical representations simply serve to bring out their extraordinary power and majesty. More than other creatures they were destined to reveal the power, the majesty, and the glory of God, and to guard His holiness in the garden of Eden, in tabernacle and temple, and in the descent of God to the earth.” (Berkhof, p.146)

Seraphim

Mentioned only in Isaiah 6:2-7, where they continually worship the LORD calling to one another, *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

“In distinction from the Cherubim, they stand as servants round about the throne of the heavenly King, sing His praises, and are ever ready to do His bidding. While the Cherubim are the mighty ones, they [the Seraphim] might be called the nobles among the angels. While the former guard the holiness of God, they serve the purpose of reconciliation, and thus prepare men for the proper approach to God.” (Berkhof, p.146)

Demons

Their origin

Though created good (Gen 1:31), there are two passages in Scripture which teach that some of the angels fell from the original state in which they were placed.

2 Peter 2:4 – *“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment”*

Jude 6 - *“And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—”*

While the specifics of their sin are not revealed, the historical understanding is that they exalted themselves against God seeking to usurp His position. The books of Ezekiel & Isaiah may give insight into the sin of their leader – Satan “the anointed cherub”

Satan

Observe two prophetic passages which give us insight:

Ezekiel 28: 12-17 *“Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: “You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. 14. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. 15. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. 16. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. 17. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground...”*

Isaiah 14:12-15 *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 13. You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; 14. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ 15. But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.”*

John 8:44 *“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*

1 John 3:8 *“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”*

Satan is a creature, created by God; originally endowed with sinlessness, beauty described as splendor & wisdom (Ezekiel 28: 12, 15, 17)

Satan is a cherub (Ezekiel 28:14)

As a cherub, he had the special position of “covering” (Ezekiel 28:17)

Satan radiated “brightness” or “splendor”; a word used 22x exclusively with the glory radiating from a supreme potentate. (Eze 28:17)

Satan was originally covered with precious stones (as was the High Priest; Eze 28:13)

Satan had musical instrumentation beyond a voice (Eze 28:13)

“The workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.” (KJV)

“The workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you, on the day that you were created.”
(NASV)

The NASV has a footnote “Or tambourines and flutes”

Satan was “*anointed*,” a term often denoting a sacred trust (Eze 28:14)

Satan is the author and originator of sin; specifically rebellion & insurrection, lying and murder (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8)

He is the head of the fallen angels who joined him in rebellion. He is called “*the prince of this world*” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and even “*the god of this world*” (2 Cor 4:4).

The name “Satan” means “adversary”. He attacks the crown of God’s creation, mankind, works destruction and is therefore called *Apollyon* or “destroyer”. He further is called *Diabolos* or “accuser”, who accuses the people of God (Rev 12:10).

The original sin of Satan involved “trade” or “merchandizing” (Eze 28:16)

Satan’s original assigned location before he was cast down was on the earth. For he reasoned he would “ascend into heaven... above the heights of the clouds...” but God said he would be “cut down to the ground” (Isa 14:12-16)

Furthermore he was in “Eden” before he sinned. Here God would make the garden he placed Adam & Eve in.

Satan, and all the angelic realm, were apparently created before the six days of creation recorded in Genesis 1 (Job 28:4-7)

Satan was called a “son of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7)

As a cherub, Satan has the face of an _____.

“As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf’s foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces.” (Ezek 1:4-11)

“And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was a human face, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the cherubim mounted up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the Chebar canal.” (Ezek 10:14, 15)

Observe that here God reveals the face of a cherub to be that of an ox. Or rather, the ox in the physical realm reveals to us, in a no doubt shadowy manner, the strength and power of a cherub’s face.

Consider further that the ox was frequently used in ancient times for idol worship. Baal worship was often in the form of an ox. The Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai built a golden calf. The word cherub, in Syriac and Chaldee, signifies to till or plough, the proper work of an ox. Eastern religions hold the cow (ox) to be sacred. What could this be but Satan’s craftily devised seduction of humanity? Thus mankind worships the creature; a cherub.

Consider that if pride was Satan’s particular sin, then some understanding may be gained as to the direction of temptation he laid before Adam & Eve, appealing to the same ambition in them.

Key Passage on Angels – Hebrews 1

DOCTRINE OF MAN

Gender neutrality, political correctness and the *God-breathed* Scripture

There is a strong sentiment in our day that to use the word “man” to refer to the human race in general denigrates women. Those making this objection would prefer the use of only “gender neutral” terms such as “humanity,” “humankind,” “human beings,” or “persons” when referring to the human race.

One passage, however, provides what amounts to “Divine warrant” based not just on the precise usage of the God-breathed scripture, but upon the theological implications of such usage.

Genesis 5:1-2 says, *“This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and **named them Man** when they were created.”*

The Hebrew term translated “Man” is *adam*, the same term used for the name of the first male, Adam, and the same term used to distinguish man from woman (Gen 2:22; 3:12).

“Therefore the practice of using the same term to refer (1) to male human beings and (2) to the human race generally is a practice that originated with God himself, and we should not find it objectionable or insensitive.” (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem, p.440)

It might be argued that this usage of the term was culturally limited within the context of the Hebrew language. This is false, however, in that God's activity recorded in Genesis 5 is clearly that of choosing a name to apply to all of humanity.

"The theological issue is whether there is a suggestion of male leadership or headship in the family from the beginning of creation. The fact that God did not choose to call the human race "woman," but "man," probably has some significance for understanding God's original plan for men and women." (Grudem, p.440)

Scriptural Account of the Origin of Man

Scripture offers a twofold account of the creation of man (Gen 1 & 2)

There is no contradiction between the two accounts. Rather, the first contains the accounting of the creation of all things in broad chronological fashion. The second contains a grouping of things in relation to man indicating that the entirety of the created realm was prepared as a fit habitation for the crown of God's creation.

Man's creation was preceded by a solemn Divine counsel

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

The Creation of man was an immediate act of God

Note that the Scripture suggests what Berkhof calls a "mediate creation" in some sense. Consider the statements...

"Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." (Genesis 1:11)

"Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." (Genesis 1:20)

"Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." (Genesis 1:24)

"Whatever indication of mediacy in the work of creation is contained in the former expressions, is entirely wanting in the latter. Evidently the work of God in the creation of man was not mediated in any sense of the word." (*Systematic Theology*, Berkhof, p.182)

The creation of man by God was precipitated by Divine consultation, acted upon by Divine Omnipotence and immediately executed. It was not a process.

Man was created after the Divine Image in distinction from the lower creatures

Scripture presents a twofold distinction in mankind's nature

“Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2:7; ESV)

Here the Scripture makes the first strong suggestion of what is elsewhere expressly taught. There is a two-fold nature to man. The two elements are the body and the breath or spirit of life breathed into it by God, and by the combination of the two man became a “living soul” (KJV).

“...and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” (Eccl 12:7)

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ” (Matt 10:28)

“And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat.” (Luke 8:55)

“For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Cor 5:1-8)

“If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.” (Phil 1:22-24)

“The prevailing representation of the nature of man in Scripture is clearly dichotomic.” (Systematic Theology, Berkhof, p.192)

*“This view is technically called *dichotomy*. Alongside of it, however, another made its appearance, to the effect that human nature consists of three parts, body, soul, and spirit. It is designated by the term *trichotomy*. The tri-partite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy...” (Berkhof, p.191)*

A thorough study of Scripture indicates that taken as a whole, the testimony of Sacred Scripture is to a dualistic view of mankind: body and spirit, or, body and soul; with soul and spirit being used synonymously.

Man is immediately placed in an exalted position

Man is represented in Scripture as standing, immediately, at the apex of all the created world, crowned as king of the “lower creation” and given the “Dominion Mandate” to subdue the earth. Again, man’s position in the world is not one achieved through a process.

“And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (Genesis 1:28)

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Psalms 8:3-8)

This Age’s Account of the Origin of Man – Evolution

The fundamental and underlying assumption of Darwinian Evolution: Man descended from the lower animals through a process of natural selection and irrational forces. Strict continuity between the animal world and man is assumed.

Problems with the theory

The theory is contrary to the explicit teachings of Holy Scripture in some fundamental ways

The Bible could hardly teach more clearly than it does that man is the product of a direct and special creative act of God, rather than of a process of development out of the simian stock of animals. It asserts that God formed man out of the dust of the ground...” (Berkhof, p.184)

Observe that the Scripture teaches a clear distinction between the “flesh” of man and that of all animals: *“For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.”* (1 Cor 15:39)

“Furthermore, Scripture also teaches that man was at once separated from the lower creation by an enormous chasm. He at once stood on a high intellectual, moral, and religious level, as created in the image of God and was given dominion over the lower creation.” (Berkhof, p.184)

By the fall into sin, however, man lost his high position and became subject to a process of degeneration and corruption.

“This is quite the opposite of what the evolutionary hypothesis teaches us. According to it man stood on the lower level at the beginning of his career, but slightly removed from the brute, and

has been rising to high levels ever since.” (Berkhof, p.185)

From goo to you by way of the zoo. – Frank Peretti

Evolutionary theory, then, asserts a movement from lesser to greater, from more primitive to more advanced. Scripture asserts a movement from greater to lesser, from more advanced to more primitive.

Scriptural theology of the Creation of Man

God did not need to create man, yet created us for His own glory

What is the chief purpose of man?

The Westminster Catechism asks: What is chief and highest end of man? *"Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever."*

The normal experience of a Christian is rejoicing in the Lord and in the lessons He teaches on life's path. (Rom 5:2-3; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16-18; et al.)

Man in the Image of God

The meaning of “the image of God”

“The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God.” (Grudem, p.442) The question is “how”?

When God said, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”* (Gen 1:26), He meant “Let us make man to be like us and to represent us.” (Grudem, p.443)

The Fall: God's image distorted & corrupted but not lost

Did The Fall of man involve a complete loss of the image of God? No.

After the flood, God gave specific commands to Noah and his descendants saying, *“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image”* (Genesis 9:6)

With The Fall mankind descended into sin, corrupting his standing before God's Law (no longer righteous; Romans 3:10), his morals (no longer holy; Isaiah 6:5; Romans 1:24) and his knowledge (darkened in his understanding; Romans 1:21).

The three-fold functions of the soul

Here the Three Transcendentals give us our best clue to understanding the fullness of the *imageo deo*.

Truth, Goodness & Beauty are mirrored in man by **Cognition, Volition & Affection**. Man is thus rational, capable of & called upon to make true choices that are fundamentally contingent and has an imagination capable of creativity.

It is in both the pursuit of & denial of the Three Transcendentals that man reveals himself to be made in the image of God. For only man is drawn inexorably toward things eternal; drawn toward His Maker. Ponder further the reality that mankind represents the culmination of God's infinitely wise and powerful action in creation. Ponder that of all created things, both animate and inanimate, the Creator of heaven and earth has chosen to become like unto only one "kind"; mankind. Furthermore, redemption has been secured and offered to only mankind; not to the fallen angelic realm.

Truly there is something far deeper than we realize when we ponder the meaning of being made in God's image.

Man as Male and Female

Harmonious interpersonal relationships are God's eternal experience and His intentional creation design for mankind

"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:24,25)

"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:24-26)

Equality in Personhood and importance of each

Yet with differences in Roles

Ponder the interpersonal relationships within the Trinity, from eternity past, and the God-designed male/female relationship in marriage.

"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor 11:3)

Distinct roles existed before The Fall

Adam was created first; then Eve (1 Timothy 2:13)

Eve was created as a helper for Adam (Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:9)

Adam named Eve (Gen 2:19-20)

God named the human race “Man”, not “Woman” (Gen 5:2)

The serpent came to Eve first (Gen 3:1)

God called Adam to account first after The Fall (Gen 2:15-17)

Adam, not Eve, represented the human race (1 Cor 15:22; Rom 5:15)

The curse brought a distortion of previous roles, not the introduction of new ones

Redemption in Christ reaffirms the Creation order

[The above a summary of Grudem chapter 22]

Biblical Masculinity (MacArthur, Think Biblically, ch 8)

Biblical Femininity (MacArthur, Think Biblically, ch 9)

DOCTRINE OF SIN

“The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are ‘words and names’ which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes any one a new creature in Christ is to send light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner. The material creation in Genesis began with ‘light,’ and so also does the spiritual creation. God ‘shines into our hearts’ by the work of the Holy Ghost, and then spiritual life begins (2 Cor. 4:6). Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies, and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul’s disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the Church in the nineteenth century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.”
(*Holiness*, J.C. Ryle, 1877, p.1)

Susanna Wesley bore nineteen children, including John and Charles Wesley. One day John asked her to define sin. The following is her definition of sin:

"Son, whatever weakens your reasoning, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes away your relish for spiritual things; in short, if anything increases the authority and power of the flesh over the Spirit, then that to you becomes sin, however good it is in itself."

Biblically Described

Romans 1:1 – 3:20

One of the fundamental New Testament treatises on sin is found in Romans 1:18 – 3:20). Here the Spirit of God breaths out Holy Writ revealing that sin begins with a suppression of truth in which truth is exchanged for a lie. This then is tightly followed by failure to honor God & be thankful to His Divine Majesty for all things (1:18-21).

This quickly descends into violation of commandments I – IV as man’s relationship with his Maker is corrupted (1:21-22)

Thereupon follows violation of commandments V – X, as the dishonor of God’s authority is further manifested in dishonor of the father’s authority (commandment V), and again as a soul clutching at that which is not rightful, thus manifesting itself in anger/murder (commandment VI), lust/adultery (commandment VII), envy/theft (commandment VIII), & malice/deceit (commandment IX), all of which have, at their root & core, the violation of God’s Immutability, as it ought to be dimly seen in mankind in the form of contentment. Hence, covetousness, prohibited by the 10th commandment, is the very negation of contentment and rests at the root of commandments VI through IX (Romans 11:23-32).

Stunning & sweeping then, the God-breathed climax of this Divine condemnation against all mankind in the 3rd chapter. “*For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are*

under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.' (Romans 3:9-20; ESV)

“Sin is a violation of law, God’s law. It is a violation of the category of *ought*; it is wrong; it ought not to be.” (*Collected Writings of John Murray, Vol. 2 - Select Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p.77)

Sin is not simply unwise, inexpedient, hurtful, painful, calamitous or unfortunate. It ought not to be. It violates God’s law; God’s nature.

Succinct then the *God-breathed* statement: “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4; ESV)

A 1592 Creedal Summary

“It is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.” (1592 Anglican Ninth Article of Religion)

The theology behind the Hebrew triadic “sin, iniquity & transgression”

There is a frequently appearing grouping of three Hebrew words that seem to suggest a comprehensive description of the overall category known in theology as “sin”.

The three Hebrew words are *chata* (2398), *avown* (5771) & *pesha* (6588). The KJV, NKJV, NASV & ESV all consistently translate these with the English words “sin”, “iniquity” & “transgression”. The NIV is not consistent in its translation. This will be shown shortly. Consider the following passages from the ESV.

Psalms 32:1-2 “How blessed is he whose transgression (6588) is forgiven, whose sin (2401 from 2398) is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity (5771), and in whose spirit there is no deceit!” (NASV)

Psalms 32:5 “I acknowledged my sin(2401) to you, and I did not cover my iniquity(5771); I said, “I will confess my transgressions (6588) to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity(5771) of my sin(2401). (NASV)

Psalm 51:1-2 “Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions (6588). Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity (5771) and cleanse me from my sin (2401).” (NASV)

Psalm 103:10-12 “He has not dealt with us according to our sins(2401), nor rewarded us according to our iniquities(5771). For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions(6588) from us.” (NASV)

Daniel 9:24 “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression (6588), to put an end to sin (2401) and to atone for iniquity (5771), to bring in everlasting righteousness...” (NASV)

Consider the meaning of *chata* (2398) & *chatta* (2401)

Here is the most important word for sin in the Old Testament occurring about 580 times. It is very similar to the Greek *hamartano* (264). It means to come short of the goal; to be off target; to fall short of God’s standard. It can be a breach of civil law (Genesis 40:11), or a serious breakdown in a personal relationship (Judges 11:27). Consider Romans 3:23... Here is the image of an arrow in flight hitting wide of the bulls-eye. Whether deliberate choice or secondary effect from previous choices, the individual bears the blame; the guilt.

Consider the meaning of *pesha* (6588)

Here is a revolt or refusal to be in subjection to rightful authority. It is a willful & cognitively thought out transgression of law. It is a willfully rebellious & premeditated crossing of an established line.

Pesha is “the technical term for willful deviation from the path of righteousness (see Amos 2:4; *Thus says the LORD, for three transgressions (6588) of Judah and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they rejected the law of the LORD...*)

Here is a premeditated crossing of the line of God’s law. It is a willfully rebellious pre-mediated acting out.

Whereas the primary sense of *chata* is that of missing the mark, the primary sense of *pesha* is more sinister. It is a willful & ‘thought through’ trespass.

Consider the meaning of *avown* (5771)

Here is a depraved action; a perversity. Here is the crooked behavior, an infraction of moral law.

The noun, *Avown* (5771; *au-vone*) is derived from *Avah* (5753) which means “to crook, to be

bent, to writhe; to act perversely, to be perverse, to distort or twist, to turn upside down, to make crooked. Here is the twisting of the sinner's inner nature. Observe the collective nature of iniquity in Genesis 15:16.

While the primary focus of the first two words, *chata* & *pesha* is upon the outward action, the focus of *avown* is upon the inner consequence of the choices made.

Theologically here are the two fangs of sin: Guilt & Corruption

Sin brings two consequences to the sinner. The first is his standing in relation to God's Law. He is guilty. Legally he is under condemnation. And while the first consequence is horrific enough the second is more sinister.

Not only is he guilty outwardly in relation to God's Law, he is also now inwardly bent or twisted. He is corrupted, polluted, stained & impure.

The old hymn *Rock of Ages* captures the theology well when it says, **"Be of sin the double cure. Save from wrath & make me pure."**

The *wrath* the hymn speaks of is related to our guilt before God's Law. The pronouncement of justification upon the sinner, whereby God declares the sinner "just" because the sinner is now clothed in a "God-righteousness from Christ (Isaiah 61:10), solves this forensic or legal problem of guilt.

The *being made pure* the hymn speaks of is the ministration of the indwelling Holy Spirit Who calls, the now saved sinner, to holiness. Here is the God-designed method of dealing with the inner corruption & twisted nature which the Hebrew word **iniquity** describes.

The first problem of sin, "guilt", is solved by Justification; being legally declared "just" by God. The second problem of sin, inner corruption or perversion of nature, is solved by Sanctification.

The distinction may be seen in the difference between a sinner asking, *"Forgive Thou my sin,"* and *"God be merciful to me the sinner!"*

Finally, *avown* is the truth behind the proverb that says, **"We become our choices."**

Consider the New Testament's theological parallels

Romans 1 & 3

Ponder the movement of thought in Romans 1:18-31. Here clear downward spiral of sin is depicted.

Observe the initial sins of not honoring God nor giving thanks. Observe the '*missing of the mark*' nature of these sins as they became fools rather than wise. Observe the replacement of God

worship with man worship (verses 18-23)

Note the three frightful pronouncements: *Therefore God gave them over or up...*

God gives them over to dishonored bodies (vss 24-25)

God then gives them over to degrading or vile passions (vss. 26-27)

Finally God gives them over to depraved or debased minds (vs. 28-32)

Consider again the specific naming of sins & transgressions in this 1st chapter.

Now consider the listing of sin in chapter 3. “*As it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. 13 Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. 14 Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known. 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.*”

Do you see the shift; the change from the listing of the 1st chapter? Chapter 1 identifies specific deeds, actions as well as attitudes. Chapter 3 does not. Chapter 3 speaks more to what the man is inside than what he does outside. Chapter 3 is fundamentally portraying what iniquity looks like.

Ephesians 2:1-3

*And you were dead in the **trespasses** and **sins** 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were **by nature children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind.*

Here again we see the echo of the Hebrew Hebrew terms and their meanings:

Chata (sin; O.T.) = *sins* (Eph 2)

Pesha (transgression; O.T.) = *trespasses* (Eph 2)

Avown (iniquity; O.T.) = ***by nature children of wrath*** (Eph 2)

The Hebrew Triad and the Virgin Birth

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity (5771) and transgression (6588) and sin (2403), but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity (5771) of the fathers on the children and the

children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6-7)

Ponder what we are told here. God, in His mercy & grace, will forgive *avown*, *pasha* & *chata*. But, there is a consequence to sin. And here specifically named, despite the legal forgiveness is the consequent of visiting the *avown* of the fathers on the children to the 4th generation.

Observe that only *avown* is passed on or visited generationally.

Observe the specific statement that it is the *avown* of the father; not the mother.

Observe that, whereas the first two words, *chata* & *pasha*, involve guilt, given their outward focus on specific behavior, *avown* speaks not so much of outward action as the inner corruption or bentness that takes place in partial result of the outward action.

Now ask the question, 'Why was the virgin birth necessary?' Fundamentally, a key part of the answer is that being born as a man, He could not have the *avown* of a biological father visited upon Him.

For the 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity to join Himself with human flesh and become man, He had to come and clothe Himself in the veil of flesh called humanity. God had to join Himself with flesh in a God chosen womb for that which was to be born to be both man & God.

Because it is through our earthly fathers that *avown* (iniquity; depravity) is passed, and not through the mother, thus the virgin birth was necessary.

Jesus, born of a woman, did not have the iniquity of Adam & every other father in His blood-line visited to Him. The absolute purity & holiness of Deity thus clothed itself with absolutely pure, holy & unstained by *avown* humanity.

The theological necessity of the virgin birth hinges on the theology behind Exodus 34. What some theological systems call Original Sin was not passed on to Jesus. Thus He came as the 2nd Adam from above, His flesh made in the same purity and holiness as the first Adam's had been.

The Hebrew Triad & the Doctrines of Redemption

Observe the legal, forensic nature of Exodus 34's pronouncement of "forgiveness". And yet, there is a visiting of iniquity, despite the forgiveness.

The Doctrine of Justification is the grand doctrine of being pronounced just because a God-righteousness has been wrapped around us; the righteousness of Christ.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness... (Isaiah 61:10)

Yet, the New Testament teaches there is still a problem of sin within. Thus the Doctrine of Sanctification is the grand doctrine of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as He first quickens us and then daily shapes us into Christ's image by putting to death the old man and his deeds.

The visiting of the *avown* (iniquity) is answered redemptively by sanctification.

The Hebrew Triad of Exodus 34 & sound translations

Comparison of translations of Exodus 34:7

King James Version (KJV)

"Keeping (5341) mercy (2617) for thousands, forgiving (5375) iniquity (5771) and transgression (6588) and sin (2403), and that will by no means clear the guilty (5352); visiting (6485) the iniquity (5771) of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

"Who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

English Standard Version (ESV)

"Keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

New International Version (NIV)

"Maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

New Living Translation (NLT)

"I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected — even children in the third and fourth generations."

Observe that the KJV, NKJV, NASV & ESV all consistently agree on their translations of the three Hebrew words for sin here.

Observe that the NIV equivocates in the passage. The first time it encounters *avown* it translates it as "wickedness". The second time it encounters *avown* it translates it as "sin". Thus the NIV translation of Exodus 34:7 creates the following errors:

1. God punishes children for their father's sin; and that to the 3rd & 4th generation.
2. A key part of the doctrine behind the Virgin Birth is gutted.
3. A key link of the Old Testament's understanding of sin & its relation to the doctrines of justification & sanctification is gutted.
4. Exodus 34 contradicts Ezekiel 18; in the New International Version.

William Barclay provides a very thorough exegetical analysis of the Hebrew & Greek words for the category of sin. Here is a readable layperson's exposure to the Scriptural terms & content.²

Scriptural Implications:

Sin is anything less than absolute perfection

"The slightest outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God's revealed will and character constitutes a sin, and at once makes us guilty in God's sight." (Ryle, p.2)

"There are an infinite number of angles at which one may fall, but only one angle at which one can stand straight." – G.K. Chesterton

"You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Does Jesus mean what He said? Is God's standard of what constitutes sin this severe?

Philosophically understood:

Evil, or Sin, is a deprivation of a "good".

Sin begins in the imagination.

Hence, the mind, the spirit, the heart of man. The Divine Voice distantly, from 3 millennia ago, thunders the command, *"Keep thy heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs [issues] of life."* (Proverbs 4:23)

Did not Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-28) settle the point that a man may not commit an outward visible act of wickedness, yet within his heart, within the thoughts of his imagination, still violate God's law.

Consider the lyrics to Casting Crowns *"Slow Fade"*

Be careful little eyes what you see
It's the second glance that ties your hands as darkness pulls the strings

² William Barclay, *The Apostle's Creed* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 252ff.

Be careful little feet where you go
For it's the little feet behind you that are sure to follow

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
It's a slow fade, it's a slow fade

Be careful little ears what you hear
When flattery leads to compromise, the end is always near
Be careful little lips what you say
For empty words and promises lead broken hearts astray

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day

The journey from your mind to your hands
Is shorter than you're thinking
Be careful if you think you stand
You just might be sinking

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
Daddies never crumble in a day
Families never crumble in a day

Oh be careful little eyes what see
Oh be careful little eyes what you see
For the Father up above is looking down in love
Oh be careful little eyes what you see

Sin includes both things committed & omitted

Sin includes not just those things we ought not to do, but also those things we ought to do and don't. Sins of Commission and Sins of Omission.

Does not James 4:17 say, “*Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*”

Do not the “goats” stand condemned for their *failure to do good deeds* in the parable of the Sheep & the Goats? (Mathew 25)

“Lord, forgive me all my sins, and specially my sins of omission.” (Archbishop Usher just before his death)

Sin may, then, be committed out of ignorance

The 4th & 5th chapters of Leviticus and the 15th of Numbers distinctly teach the existence of sins of ignorance which bring uncleanness needful of atonement. (Leviticus 4:1-35; 5:14-19; Numbers 15:25-29)

Christ’s own words expressly teach this: “*But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating.*” A light beating but a beating nevertheless. (Luke 12:48)

“We shall do well to remember that when we make our own miserably imperfect knowledge and consciousness the measure of our sinfulness, we are on very dangerous ground. A deeper study of Leviticus might do us much good.” (Ryle, p.3)

Furthermore, the very category of sins of omission establishes the potential of sinning with complete ignorance of it. For who among us has a clue as to what course our life would have taken had not early veered from the path of complete obedience! Even more, the older I live, the less I live out what was designed for me in His “perfect will”; that will of God’s that would have been had I never sinned. The mountain of what should have been, and is not, grows exponentially with every passing year.

The Scriptural doctrine of sin is the antidote to that fuzzy and hazy theology so prevalent in our day

Think seriously on Ryle’s charge, in his day, “that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity nowadays which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not full measure, good weight, and sixteen ounces to the pound.” (p.12)

“It neither exercises influence on daily conduct, nor comforts in life, nor gives peace in death; and those who hold it, often awake too late to find that they have got nothing solid under their feet. Now I believe the likeliest way to cure and mend this defective kind of religion is to bring forward more prominently the old scriptural truth about the sinfulness of sin. People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven, and live like pilgrims, until they really feel that they are in danger of hell.” (p.12)

What, my friend, does your religion do for you? Make you feel cuddly and warm and filled? Or does it lead, yes, drive you to your knees to cry out daily for mercy?

The Scriptural doctrine of sin is the antidote to liberal theology in our day

There is a relativism that has settled in our day across the theological landscape. Do not judge is the all-important directive. Everybody is right and nobody wrong. Everyone who dies goes to heaven. Besides there is no hell. For what kind of a God would torment people in hellfire for all eternity?

“The atonement and substitution of Christ, the personality of the devil, the miraculous element in Scripture, the reality and eternity of future punishment, all these mighty foundation-stones are coolly tossed overboard, like lumber, in order to lighten the ship of Christianity, and enable it to keep pace with modern science.” (Ryle, p.13)

But Ryle raises an existential challenge: “We must...demand a plain answer to some plain questions. We must ask them to lay their hands on their hearts, and tell us whether their favorite opinions comfort them in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, by the bedside of dying parents, by the grave of beloved wife or child. We must ask them whether a vague earnestness, without definite doctrine, gives them peace at seasons like these.” (p.13)

My experience in hospice, after 550 patients & their families vividly revealed to me the utter bankruptcy of Liberal Theology in the face of pain, suffering and death. So frequently, in discussions about the afterlife, and their hope of something there, something better, I would be asked, “But, it’s not like anyone has been there and come back to tell us about it, is it?”

In like manner, Ravi Zacharias charges atheism with bankruptcy when it comes to helping people who are in the **“passages of life”**.

My friend, what is needed, is some knife-edge doctrinal expositions of sin, guilt and corruption. And after this, we must tell them to they will not find rest until there is “submission to the old doctrines of man’s ruin, and Christ’s redemption, and simple childlike faith in Jesus.” (p.14)

The Scriptural doctrine of sin is the antidote to the low view of personal holiness

Dear friend, ponder the words over a century ago by Ryle. “This is a very painful and delicate subject, I know; but I dare not turn away from it. It has long been my sorrowful conviction that the standard of daily life among professing Christians in this country has been gradually falling. I am afraid that Christ-like charity, kindness, good-temper, unselfishness, meekness, gentleness, good-nature, self-denial, zeal to do good, and separation from the world are far less appreciated than they ought to be, and than they used to be in the days of our fathers.” (Holiness, Ryle, p.15-16)

Ryle suggests that “a certain profession of religion has become so fashionable and comparatively easy in the present age that the streams which were once narrow and deep have become wide and shallow, and what we have gained in outward show we have lost in quality!” (p.16)

Who grieves over their sin? Who contemplates a closer walk in holiness this year than last? This month than last? We must realize that it is frightfully possible to live a careless, easy-going, half-worldly life, all the while professing to be evangelical Christians.

“Just in proportion as we realize how much Christ has done for us, shall we labor to do much for Christ. Much forgiven, we shall love much.” (p.17)

My friend, I am convinced that the Church today needs to more fully realize the stunning sinfulness of man. This drives us to the Savior.

The Origin of Sin

“Since by man came death...”

The question of Original Sin revolves around the Biblical teaching concerning the Fall of Man in Genesis 3.

That the sin of Adam & Eve resulted in immediate and devastating consequences is undeniable. Furthermore, the free fall into depravity of the generations that immediately followed should startle and somber every thinking Christian.

Cain, the firstborn, murders his brother Abel. Cain then consciously departs from the presence of God and journeys east. But five generations later we have polygamy and a descent into such murderous anger, following Cain’s footsteps, that Lamech boasts, *“I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.”* (Genesis 4:23, 24)

Further stunning is the rapid collapse of all godliness until God says, “enough”, in the days of Noah.

Is Genesis 6 causally connected to Genesis 3? The connection is obvious. But how are we to understand this “cause & effect” relationship between Adam’s sin and the depth of depravity mankind sank into so quickly?

Romans 5:12-21 establishes the principle of Federal Headship as it describes the far-reaching and devastating effects of Adam’s sin.

“(12) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned - (13) for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (15) But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. (16) The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in

justification. (17) For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (18) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. (19) For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (20) The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, (21) so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:12-21; NASV)

Clear it is that in Adam, something happened that has affected all mankind. The question is “what is that effect and how far-reaching was it?”

Historic Theological Positions (from Cottrell, chapter 9)

Semi-Pelagianism – This is the view of the early church from Irenaeus (2nd Century) up until Augustine (latter 4th Century). This view holds that Adam’s sin had a partial spiritual effect upon all mankind. This effect may be described as “bentness” or “proneity” to evil. Yet, the will is not in bondage and is thus able to respond to God. Children are conceived and born innocent; free from guilt and resultant condemnation.

Augustinian Calvinism – This is the view first championed by Augustine (4th Century) and during the Reformation by Calvin. This view holds that Adam’s sin had a complete effect of total corruption; by which is meant not that we are as bad as we could be, but that the whole person has been corrupted. This includes the will, hence “bondage of the will”. It includes also the categories of guilt and resultant condemnation to hell unless God sovereignly intervenes with unconditional grace.

Pelagianism – In opposition to Augustine, Pelagius, a contemporary, held that Adam’s sin had no direct causal effect upon all mankind. Children are conceived and born without any guilt or effect spiritually from Adam.

Roman Catholicism – The view of Rome affirms freedom of the will, and hence only a partial depravity. However, all inherit a state of guilt and condemnation from Adam. *Paedo*-Baptism is therefore required.

Guilt, Depravity & Bondage of the Will

Consider the definition offered by John MacArthur: “*Original sin* is the biblical doctrine that explains your child's sinful proclivity. It means children do not come into the world seeking God and righteousness. They do not even come into the world with a neutral innocence. They come into the world seeking the fulfillment of sinful and selfish desires. Scripture also teaches a doctrine called *total depravity*, referring to the extent of original sin. Although the outworking of the sin nature does not necessarily attain full expression in everyone's behavior, it is nonetheless

called *total* depravity because there is no aspect of the human personality, character, mind, emotions, or will that is free from the corruption of sin or immune to sin's enticements."

Original sin is typically understood to include three components: **Guilt, Depravity and Bondage of the Will.**

Guilt speaks of our legal standing before God's Law.

Depravity speaks of the inner corruption or pollution sin brings.

Total Depravity teaches that man's entire being is corrupted; not that he is as corrupted as possible, but that the whole of man has been corrupted including His volition; his will.

Bondage of the Will falls under the category of Total Depravity. Simply put, Calvinism teaches a Total Depravity which includes the will, rendering man incapable of anything good, including a response of faith.

If Bondage of the Will is accepted as the Scriptural teaching, then there are only two theological paradigms capable of explaining salvation.

The first paradigm is that **God sovereignly chooses** who He will provide regeneration to thus unconditionally choosing and irresistibly calling the sinner to grace. Here is the "U" and "I" of traditional Calvinism; Unconditional Election & Irresistible Grace.

The second paradigm is that **God sovereignly enables** man to respond in faith, the choice being up to each individual. This enabling, before the salvation choice is made, is called **prevenient grace**.

The concept of prevenient grace is that divine grace which precedes human decision. It exists prior to and without reference to anything humans may have done. Prevenient grace allows persons to engage their God-created free will to choose or reject the salvation sovereignly offered by God in Christ Jesus.

Thus God effectually overcomes the bondage of the will imputed to us by Adam's sin, thus preserving the sacred gift to mankind of freewill with its corresponding culpability for the choices made.

Prevenient Grace...Original Grace?

Dr. Cottrell sets this position forward in Chapter 9 of his book, essentially identifying Prevenient Grace as *Original Grace*.

In contrast, R.C. Sproul asserts, "The \$64,000 question is, 'Does the Bible teach such a doctrine of prevenient grace? If so, where?'" ("Does the Bible teach prevenient grace?", R.C. Sproul, from *Chosen by God*) Sproul's conclusion is, "no."

But consider just some passages which appear to do this very thing:

Titus 2:11 - *“The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.”* (NASV)

Romans 5:18 - *“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.”* (NASV)

Observe the phrase twice repeated in Romans 5:18: *“to all men”*. The Calvinist position is that Adam’s “all” and Christ’s “all” are two different things. That is the group to which Adam relates is all mankind, while the group to which Christ relates is just the Elect. But is this equivocal understanding of the same phrase, the same terms justified?

“The common approach is that, when these terms are used in relation to Adam’s sin, they are completely universal in scope; but when they are used in relation to the work of Christ, they are more limited and restricted in scope and do not really mean ‘all.’” (*The Faith Once For All*, Cottrell, p.186-187)

Reformed Theology has historically understood the Biblical passages to mean that a total depravity was imputed to all as a direct causal result of Adam’s sin. Calvinism then asserts, that given the nature of total depravity, God must sovereignly elect those he will regenerate and thus save.

Classical Arminianism, while maintaining God’s sovereignty, posits that the Scriptural data is best understood as God preveniently gracing all, restoring the capacity to respond in faith, restoring the capacity to have true volitional freedom. This prevenient grace comes to all as a direct causal result of Christ’s one act of righteousness.

It is critical to note that in this discussion, “Classical Arminianism” is understood to be that doctrinal position put forth by Jacobus Arminius himself. Hence, it is often called “Reformed Arminianism” indicating it’s clear distancing from what today is called Arminianism. This will be dealt with in greater detail under the Doctrine of Salvation.

Calvinism asserts such a stance violates God’s sovereignty. It asserts that God’s sovereignty is such that Election cannot be on the basis of a foreknowing who would respond in faith. But who is limiting God’s sovereignty? The Classical Arminian embraces the Biblical teaching of God’s sovereignty, insisting that it is upheld and reinforced by His sovereign choice to preveniently grace all mankind, thus gifting man with the genuine capacity to choose either unbelief or Biblical faith.

In this case, it would seem, that the Classical Arminian stance asserts that God is free in His sovereignty, while the Calvinist stance denies God’s ability to make such a choice.

Cottrell suggests that this passage may actually teach an Original Grace; referred to in Systematic Theology as Prevenient Grace. What we lost in Adam, we preveniently regained in Christ, on the basis of His eternally foreordained sacrifice & resurrection. Thus sinners are

enabled, conveniently, to make a morally responsible and free choice to either obey or reject the Gospel message.

Calvinism, therefore, embraces a view of Original Sin that includes Guilt, Total Depravity & Bondage of the Will. God chooses Who He will elect and enable with the gift of faith.

Semi-Pelagianism (the view of the early Church) with regard to the effect of Adam's sin, denies both Guilt and Bondage of the Will, while accepting a Partial Depravity.

Classical Arminianism, the view of Jacobus Arminius himself, holds to a view of Original Sin that denies Guilt, while affirming Total Depravity, yet on the basis of a "prevenient grace" affirming the ability of the sinner to respond in faith.

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Concordia Theological Quarterly	Restoration Quarterly
The Evangelical Quarterly	Sojourners
Interpretation	Stone-Campbell Journal
Journal of Biblical Literature	Theology Today
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	Trinity Journal
The Westminster Theological Journal	TableTalk