

The Doctrine of God

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

– A. W. Tozer

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question #4:

Q. What is God?

A. God is a Spirit whose being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth are infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

I. God is a Trinity: one God in three persons.

- A difficult doctrine to comprehend with a philosophical model or mental image. But we should not rationally expect to comprehend God with perfect clarity since God is transcendent.
- Biblical foundations
 - Monotheism: There is only one God (Deut. 6:4; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6).
 - The Father is God (1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:2; references to “God the Father”).
 - The Son (Jesus) is God (John 1:1-18, Col. 1:15-20, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 1:1-4).
 - The Holy Spirit is God (Gen. 1:2; Exod. 31:3; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17).
 - Some passages refer to multiple persons together as divine:
 - Gen. 1:26 God refers to himself as “us”; all 3 persons active in creation
 - Psalms 110:1 Yahweh & Adonai
 - John 1:1 God and the divine Word
 - Matt. 3:16-17 Father and Spirit in Jesus’ baptism (cf. Gal. 4:6)
 - Matt. 28:19 Baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - 2 Cor. 13:14 Blessing in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Definition and boundaries of the doctrine
 - God has always existed and will always exist as one God in 3 persons.
 - The 3 persons exist without confusion; all are distinct and all are fully God.
 - The 3 persons are perfectly unified.
 - No analogy perfectly captures the reality (e.g., phases of matter, sun/light/heat).
 - Scripture attributes divine functions differently to the 3 persons: the Father initiates; the Son carries out Father’s plan; the Spirit works in humans to apply Christ’s work. But because God is one, all 3 persons are inseparably involved in every divine action.

II. God is eternal.

- God has always existed and always will exist (Rev. 1:4; Ps. 90:2; 106:48; Rev. 1:8).
- God is the Creator of time and thus transcends time (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 90: 4; 2 Pet. 3:8).
- God is immortal (Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:17, 6:16).

III. God exists with aseity; he has existence and life “from himself” (in Latin, “*a se*”)

- Negatively defined: God does not depend on anything. He is completely self-sufficient (Acts 17:25).
- Positively defined: God has the fullness (plenitude) of existence, life (John 5:26), and every perfection.
- God did not create because he was lonely or had any need to fulfill. God created and redeemed us because of God’s choice for his own glory and pleasure, a joyful overflow of his own character and joy.
- There are many implications of God’s aseity:
 - God is the **Creator and Sustainer** (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11).
He is the Creator and First Cause of everything apart from God because he alone has existence and life as part of his very nature. All things depend upon God for existence not only when they begin to exist but at every moment in time.
 - God is **spirit** (John 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; Col. 1:15).
God is not physical because he created all physical things, and all physical things are limited and dependent on other material things to exist.
 - God is **one** (Deut. 6:4; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6).
There can only be one being with aseity. If there were two beings, they would only differ if each lacked one characteristic that the other possessed. But then neither would possess the fullness of all perfection.
 - God is **transcendent and holy** (Isa. 6:3; 40:8-26; Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:1-11).
God is “above” and “outside” or “beyond” all created things because he creates and sustains all things and is thus not limited by or dependent upon creation or any part of it.
 - God is **immutable** (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; Num. 23:19).
God’s nature and character cannot change. Because he already possesses the fullness of existence and every perfection, he cannot lose any perfection, and he has no lack that requires him to gain anything.
 - God is **omnipotent and free** (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Jer. 32:17; Isa. 14:27; Mark 10:27).
God’s freedom and power have no limits. There is no defect or lack in God, and there is no being or circumstance outside of God that can limit him in any way.
 - God is **omnipresent** (Ps. 139:7-12; Jer. 23:24; 1 Kgs. 8:27).
God’s presence has no limits. Because he creates and continually sustains all things, he is always immediately present to and with all things.
 - God is **omniscient** (1 John 3:20; Ps. 139:1-6; Isa. 46:9-10).
God’s knowledge has no limits. Because he creates and continually sustains all things, he always knows everything about all things (past, present, and future).

IV. God is just, righteous, and good.

- God’s justice = absolute, perfect righteousness: He is perfectly fair, good, and right in every way and in all that he does.

- God will respond to sin with justice (Exod. 34:6-7).
- God cannot excuse or ignore sin but rather must respond by enforcing justice with appropriate judgment and consequences.
- Dilemma for sinful humans: how to escape God's just condemnation?
Jesus' death is atonement for sin, i.e., takes away God's just wrath by assuming the just judgment upon himself (Rom. 3:21-26).

→ God is good (Mark 10:17-18; Ps. 34:8; 84:11; 119:68; James 1:17).
→ God is wise (Rom. 16:27; Prov. 8:12, 22-32).

V. God is gracious.

- Creation is complete gift.
- Salvation (Eph. 2:1-10; Rom. 3:23-24): Salvation from sin is completely a gift of God's undeserved favor.
- Patience (2 Pet. 3:9): God withholds judgment to allow time to repent.
- Eternity

→ God is the fullness of love in all of its forms (patience, kindness, gentleness, etc.; 1 John 4:7-12; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

VI. God is sovereign over all things.

- Df. complete power, control over all things. God is the all-powerful ruler of all who directs all events and actions according to his perfect plan.
- Creation (Rev. 4:11): Creation made solely by the power of God's will.
- Providence in history (Eph. 1:11; Isa. 40-66; Acts 17:26): God's plan includes all of history. He governs and guides all of history to his ultimate purpose according to his plan. This includes all human actions.
- Salvation (Eph. 1:3-10): God chooses to save some sinful people before the foundation of the world (predestination). Not in conflict with human beings having true freedom and responsibility. God works out his plan through free human decisions.
- Judgment (Phil. 2:10-11; Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:5-12; Rev. 20): All creation will one day see and acknowledge God's sovereignty.

VII. God is glorious.

- God's glory = God's well-deserved praise, honor, and fame. It is everything that makes God great, good, beautiful and worthy of honor.
- God pursues his glory. He desires creatures to acknowledge and delight in his glory.
- God's glory is our good. Knowing, enjoying, and living according to the source and perfection of all greatness and goodness is our greatest good (what could be greater?) and results in our greatest joy and satisfaction.

VIII. Some Fitting Responses to God

Humility

Worship: Engage in direct acts of communion with him in order to know and love him.

Obedience

Gratitude

Going Further

Beginner

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 2001), pp. 21-61.

Gerald Bray, *The Attributes of God: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2021).

Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Crossway, 2017).

Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, chapters 6-7.

Scott Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2020).

Intermediate

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 50th anniversary edition (InterVarsity Press, 2023).

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, chapters 9-10.

Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Baker, 2019).

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume* (Baker, 2011), chapters 8-10.

Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 2017).