

Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology

With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's
Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity

Lesson 3: Theology—The Doctrine of God (Abridged Overview)
Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

Abridged Overview for Class Lecture/Discussion

Note: Highlighted subjects are the minimum to be addressed in classes with time constraints.
Ask the class to read the larger version prior to the class meeting.

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Remember where Theology fits
within systematic theology.

Review the logic of the loci in the next slides.

Before Looking at the Next Slide...

Let's say together the six loci of historic Christian systematic theology. To help us start, what is the necessary first one from Whom the others come?

The Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology

1. **Theology:** What the Bible Reveals about God
2. **Anthropology:** What the Bible Reveals about Mankind
3. **Christology:** What the Bible Reveals about Jesus Christ
4. **Soteriology:** What the Bible Reveals about Salvation (This doctrine is also called **Pneumatology** and **The Application of Christ's Redemption**, What the Bible Reveals about the Holy Spirit, the key agent in applying Christ's redemption for our salvation)
5. **Ecclesiology:** What the Bible Reveals about the Church
6. **Eschatology:** What the Bible Reveals about the Last Things or The End Times

The Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology: Biblical Derivation and Meaning of the Greek Terms

1. **Theology** < θεός (*theos*) → God + λόγος (*logos*) → word, subject, message
2. **Anthropology** < ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*) → mankind + *logos*
3. **Christology** < Χριστός (*Christos*) → Christ, the Anointed One + *logos*
4. **Soteriology** < σώζω (*sōzō*) → save, keep safe, preserve, rescue, make well + *logos*; cognate: σωτήρ (*sōtēr*) → Savior, redeemer, deliverer, preserver.
Pneumatology < πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) → Spirit (the Holy Spirit); wind, breath + *logos*. **The Application of Christ's Redemption**, specifically to individuals.
5. **Ecclesiology** < ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) → assembly, congregation, church < ἐκ (*ek*) → from, out of, away from + καλέω (*kaleō*) → call, name, summon, invite → literally, (the ones) called out (by the Lord) + *logos*
6. **Eschatology** < ἔσχατον (*eschaton*) → last + *logos*: individual and cosmic end

The Integration of the Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology

The Logic of the System and a Summary of the Six Main Doctrines of the Bible

- 1. Theology:** Everything starts with God. Essential aspects of God include his triune being; that he is creator; owner; most holy, righteous, and just, such that nothing unholy ever enters his presence; steadfast love to the core of his being; and for his being completely perfect in every way.
- 2. Anthropology:** God created humans perfect, even to a limited extent in his image, but the first ones disobeyed God; this sin, which has resulted in cosmic disharmony, so corrupted themselves and their posterity that we cannot come into God's presence and have eternal life without his help. In love, God gave his law to teach his will, his plan of restoration, and to restrain sin to prevent chaos in the now sinful and evil world. What's his plan?
- 3. Christology:** Since God is love, he is unwilling to destroy sinful humans who bear his image, but to preserve his holiness, righteousness, and justice, he instituted his plan to have one perfect human being represent all others, fulfill all the law, and credit that righteousness to all people who believe in and follow him. To accomplish God's perfect will for human beings, that one righteous human also had to be divine; the only One who could fulfill all God's law is his only begotten Son, the Redeemer, Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, who did so in his First Coming to earth in his life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. The whole Bible focuses on Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus, and only Jesus (John 14:6), makes salvation, living forever in the presence of God, possible. How?
- 4. Soteriology:** This explanation of salvation explains how the Third Person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit, applies the redemption and salvation Christ has provided to all individuals who believe in and follow Jesus.
- 5. Ecclesiology:** This doctrine explains how God calls out, sets apart, brings together, and equips those whom he has redeemed in a new (i.e., renewed) covenant, the church, all those from every race and nation, to work together to most effectively bring to and implement the Good News of salvation throughout the whole world.
- 6. Eschatology:** When the time is right in God's sight, he will bring the present age to a conclusion and restore his original plan in a new (i. e., renewed) heaven and new (renewed) earth. How he has already begun to do so, is seen in what the Bible reveals about the Last Things, or The End Times, including what occurs when we die and what occurs at the end of history, when Christ Jesus returns in his Second Coming.

Today, let's talk first about...

Eschatology: The Doctrine of the Last Things

What will occur at the end—the end
of my life, and the end of history?

What?! Why are we talking about eschatology at the beginning?

Systematic theology is supposed to be a logical progression.

1. Eschatology comes from the Greek word, ἔσχατον, transliterated *eschaton*, which means last. Why then are we beginning with eschatology, actually the first part of it?
2. As theologians Anthony Hoekema and Jürgen Moltmann have observed, eschatology is at the core of Christian theology and the plan of God's redemption and renewal of his creation. In his classic text, *The Bible and the Future*, Hoekema writes, "PROPERLY TO UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY, WE must see it as an integral aspect of all of biblical revelation. Eschatology must not be thought of as something which is found only in, say, such Bible books as Daniel and Revelation, but as dominating and permeating the entire message of the Bible."
3. Hoekema then quotes Moltmann as follows: "From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of the Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set...Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, and of every Christian existence and of the whole Church." As we will see when we study the Biblical teaching of the church, the church is the major human means through which God is fulfilling his plan of redemption of his creation, a reality that has profound, extensive, and very practical implications and applications.

Eschatology Continued

4. We see what Hoekema and Moltmann mean when we observe already in Genesis 3:15 where God proclaims what Biblical scholars call the protoevangelicum, literally the first Gospel, or the first proclamation of the Gospel, the good news of God's plan of the redemption of his creation, including the salvation that he is bringing in Jesus Christ, to whom the whole Old Testament points and Whom the New Testament presents and explains.*
5. This first proclamation of the Gospel...
 - a. comes immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. God acted fast; he loves his people who alone bear his image, and he would not permit them to languish in the lamentable situation they brought upon themselves devoid of hope.
 - b. Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis are the preface of the Bible. The whole remainder of the Bible is the progressive unfolding of God's plan of redemption of his creation in Jesus Christ.

* See also the article by Arie C. Leder, "Reading the Bible Backwards: From the Ending to its Beginning and Back Again," in the Calvin Seminary *Forum*, Spring 2014, pp. 3-5. Dr. Leder is Professor in Old Testament Studies at Calvin Theological Seminary.

A Question about the Preceding Section

So OK. To properly understand the main message of the Bible, that it is the gradual unfolding of God's revelation of his plan of redemption in Jesus Christ, how do we answer the question of why this is all necessary?

Among many related questions: Why is any redemption needed? Why are certain behaviors sinful? Why will there be a final judgment?

Countless people are asking these questions, especially in this postmodern age (*op cit.* and the larger unabridged [Essential Christianity](#) PowerPoint), and in order to fulfill our God-given calling to help people understand, and to understand more ourselves so we can help others, we need to start with God. Until we consider God, there is no final answer to these questions—everything finds its meaning in him: in who he is, in what he is like, in what he has done, and in what he is doing. Therefore, let's begin.

Theology: The Doctrine of God

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

Who is God; what is he like; what has
he done; and what is he doing?

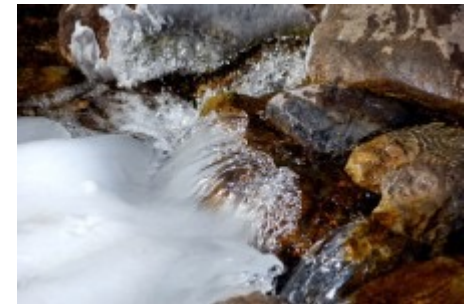
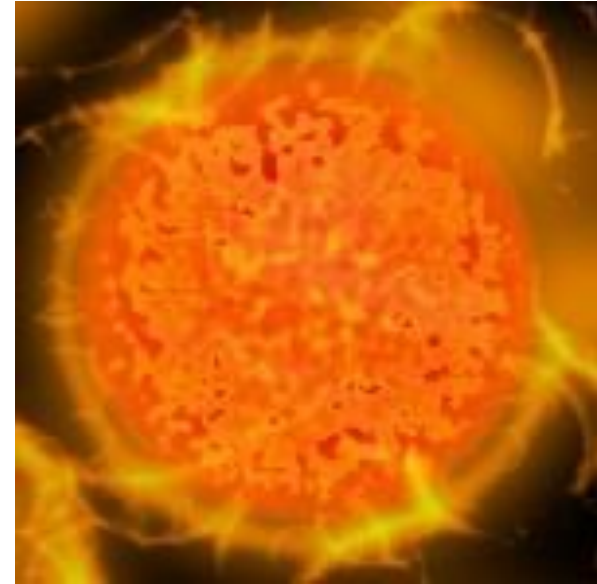
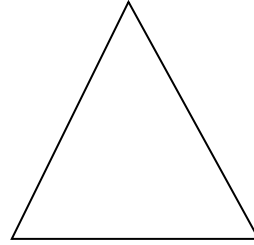
Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

Theology is a study of all the Bible teaches about God, including who he is (e.g., triune, owner, sovereign, personal, transcendent and immanent), what he is like, and how he is involved with his creation and the goodness it had when he created it out of nothing. Theology includes what the Bible teaches about God's character, that while he is essentially love to the core of his being, that love issues forth in his other characteristics or attributes, including being Most Holy, righteous, and just. The Bible explains what those qualities of God's essence are like and their significance to his creation, including to us. This section comprises highlights, implications, and very practical applications of the Biblical doctrine of theology. The study of who God is and what he is like is the essential starting point of all theology. In order to make sense out of life and to understand Christianity, including the rest of the six main doctrines, we must know who God truly is, what he is like, and how he is engaged in his creation, especially with us human beings who alone bear his image and are the crown of his creation.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Triune

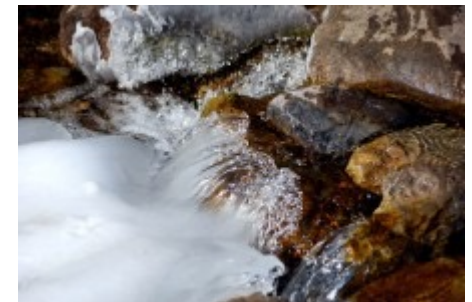
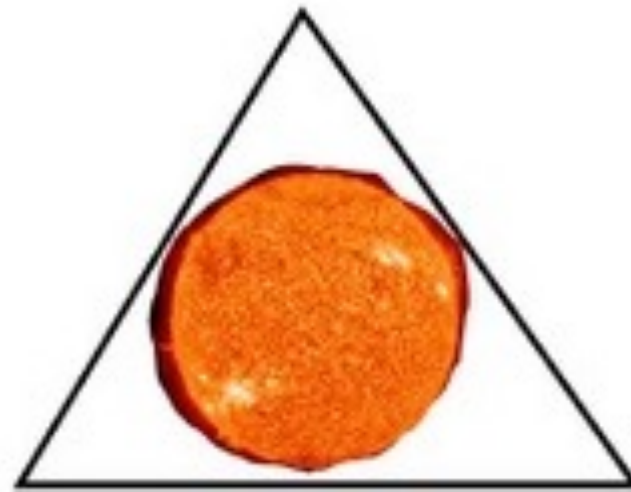
- In the triune God, three distinct Persons share one substance. God is one.
- All three Persons coexist at the same time and have for eternity but are one in essence.
- What phenomena and graphic descriptions exist to help us understand God's triune being?
- A point does occur where all three forms of water do coexist simultaneously in thermodynamic equilibrium at a singular temperature and pressure called the triple point, but not at atmospheric pressures we experience.
- Of all the symbols for the Trinity, the sun is one of the best, for it shows that it is reasonable for an entity to have three simultaneously distinct components that simultaneously share one substance. (Romans 1:20)



Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Triune

- To avoid confusion, the sun symbol should be within the triangle.
- Students have mentioned other symbols that demonstrate the reasonableness of something being three and one at the same time including the following:
 - + Colors composed of the three primary colors.
 - + Light being composed of energy, heat, and pressure.
- **Question for Reflection and Discussion:**
Do any others come to your mind?

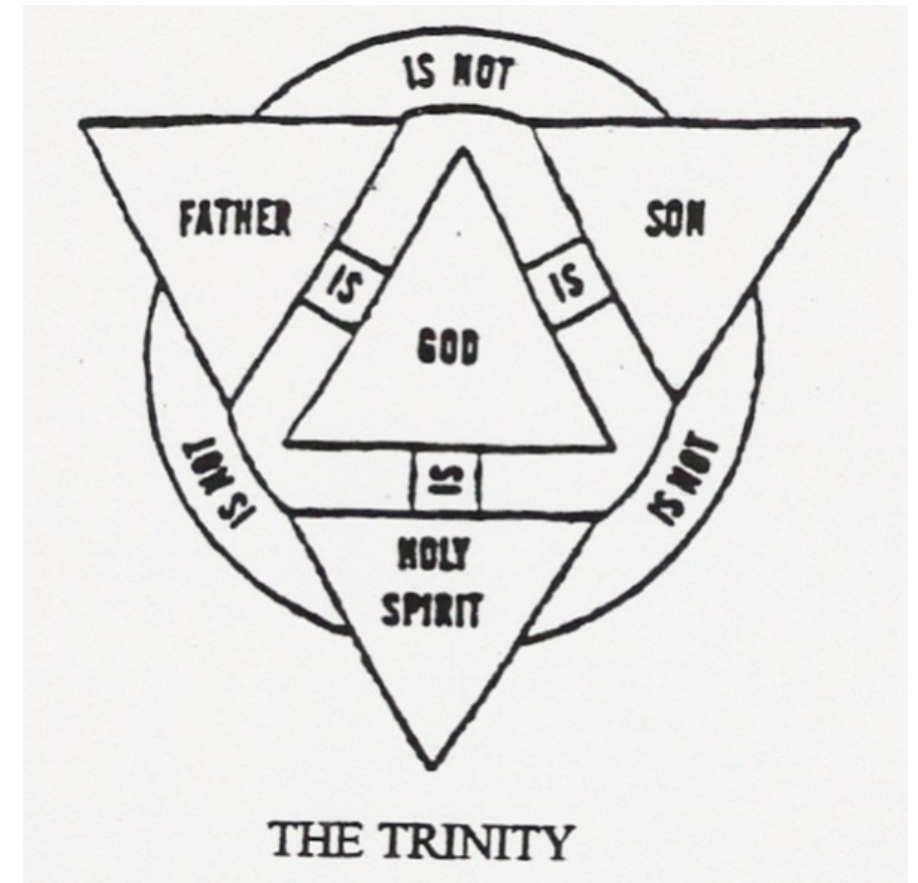


Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Triune

- In addition to symbols from the natural order, that God has built into his creation to point to him (Romans 1:20), humans have made graphic symbols to try to visualize and understand the Biblical revelation of God as being three distinct Persons who share one substance, one essence.
- Here is one ancient symbol, referred to as the shield of the Holy Trinity, that has been found in medieval stained glass. The words, usually in Latin, read logically in any direction.

The Shield of the Holy Trinity



Original Hebrew of Deuteronomy 6:4 (Cf. Mark 12:29)

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

'eḥād

yehwāh

'ēlōhēnū

yehwāh

yisrā'ēl

šema'

one

Yahweh

our God

Yahweh

Israel

hear

(LORD)

(LORD)

יְהוָה (*yehwāh*), Yahweh, the LORD < אֶהְיֶה (*'ehyeh*), I AM < הָיָה (*hāyāh*), to be

God's name, Yahweh, the LORD, communicates that he is the ground, the fundamental logical condition and basis, for all that exists. And there's more...

Original Hebrew of Deuteronomy 6:4 (Cf. Mark 12:29)

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

<i>'eḥād</i>	<i>yehwāh</i>	<i>'ēlōhênû</i>	<i>yehwāh</i>	<i>yisrā'ēl</i>	<i>šəma</i> ´
one	Yahweh (LORD)	our God	Yahweh (LORD)	Israel	hear

יְהוָה (*yehwāh*), Yahweh, the LORD < אֶהְיֶה (*'ehyeh*), I AM < הָיָה (*hāyāh*), to be

- “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” (Exodus 3:14)
- “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58) The Jews to whom he was speaking, clearly understood that Jesus was identifying himself with God; that is why they picked up stones to kill him. (8:59)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Triune

- "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2-3)
- "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4)
- "there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." (1 Corinthians 8:6)
- "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," (1 Timothy 2:5)
- See also Isaiah 44:6; 46:8-9; Mark 12:29.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- The triune God consists of three distinct Persons who share one substance, one essence. God is One.
- He is not composed of divisible parts as humans are, e.g. with a body and a soul. The whole being of God is in each of the Persons. (E.g., John 14:9-11)
- All three Persons exist at the same time and have for eternity.
- All of his attributes, his characteristics, are one with him; thus, e.g., he is love; he is life; he is truth; he is just.
- "'The most important [commandment],' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."' (Mark 12:29)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Triune

- In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation (*χαρακτήρ* [*charaktēr*], reproduction, exact likeness) of his being (*ὑποστάσεως* < *ὑποστασις* [*hypostasis*], substance, underlying essence), sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (Hebrews 1:1-3)
- The triune God consists of three distinct Persons who share one substance. God is One.
- "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

We'll explore more of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine when we focus on each of the three Persons who share one substance. To begin we can also say:

- Since all three Persons share one substance and are one God who is perfect, all three are in accord, and when we pray, all three know what we need and function in unity to provide what we need.
- All three Persons exist at the same time and have for eternity.
- Of all the symbols for the Trinity, the sun is maybe the best, for it shows that it is reasonable for an entity to have three distinct components that share one substance. (Romans 1:20)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Triune

Passages where all three Persons are alluded to or mentioned specifically:

- “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)
- “Then God (אֱלֹהִים [’*ĕlōhîm*]) said, ‘Let us make man in our image...’” (Genesis 1:26-28)
- “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isaiah 6:8)
- “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” (Isaiah 61:1)
- “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matthew 28:19)
- See also Genesis 11:7; 2 Corinthians 3:14; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Peter 1:1,2

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- The triune God consists of three distinct Persons who share one substance. God is One.
- All three Persons exist at the same time and have for eternity.
- The Old Testament Hebrew word translated God is אֱלֹהִים (’*ĕlōhîm*), which is a plural word translated in other Old Testament (OT) texts as gods, when referring to the idols and false gods. The context of a given passage tells us whether ’*ĕlōhîm*, is referring to the one true God or to the false gods that are part of demon worship. (1 Corinthians 10:20; Isaiah 44:6; John 8:44; 14:6) **The context is clear, e.g., in Genesis 1:1, while ’*ĕlōhîm* is plural, the verb is singular, which occurs throughout the OT when ’*ĕlōhîm* refers to the one and only true, triune, God.**

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Triune

- Father: He is the Creator (Deuteronomy 32:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2; James 1:17) and Giver of “Every good and perfect gift” of all we value and enjoy. (James 1:17)
- Only begotten Son Jesus Christ: He reconciles us with the Father. All things were created through him, by him, and for him, and in him they hold together. As Lord over all we need not fear the world going out of control. (Psalm 8:6; John 1:3; Hebrews 2:6-8; 5:5 (Greek, NASB); Ephesians 1:18-23; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; Romans 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 8:6)
- Holy Spirit: He applies Christ’s redemption to us, gives us saving faith, guides us into all truth, and helps us. (1 Corinthians 12:3; John 16:13) He also regenerates us, i.e., gives us new birth (e.g., John 3:1-8), sanctification (e.g., Galatians 6:7-8), and gifts to serve (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:4ff.)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- For more of the practical implications and applications of the doctrine of the Trinity, see the sections on Theology, Christology, and Pneumatology/Soteriology.
- For more on the Trinity specifically, see my essay, “Who is God, and what is he like? Part 1: What is the Trinity?” <https://fromacorntoak12.com/who-is-God/>.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

Here in these previous slides we have one of the many reasons why the early church began to formulate a system of Christian theology. The Bible from the first chapter of Genesis through the last chapter of the Book of Revelation reveals God as being triune, but the words triune or Trinity do not appear anywhere in the Bible. The doctrine is there, but it is not developed all in one place.

This is why we need theology: to help us bring together all the passages in the Bible that teach each of the six main themes of God's Word. Doing so enables us to understand these vital doctrines for ourselves and to be able to explain them to others in fulfillment of our Lord's Great Commission to us in e.g., Matthew 28:18-20.

Theology: The Doctrine of God

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

Who is God; what is he like; what
has he done; and what is he doing?

God's **Incommunicable** Characteristics

Theology: What Are God's Incommunicable Characteristics?

God's incommunicable characteristics are those aspects of his being that he has in macrocosm that are unique to him. He does not share them with any other being, human or otherwise.

God is unlike any of the false gods that have been made in the image of sinful human beings. The false gods (actually the demons behind them, since the false gods don't even exist) do evil as do those who make them.

God's incommunicable characteristics, or attributes, are typically identified as follows. A brief explanation and indication of their practical blessings will be presented in this section. His incommunicable characteristics include his being infinite, transcendent and immanent, perfect in every way including totally good, eternal, everywhere present, independent, immutable, unchangeable.

A Very Important Aspect of Learning

In all of life, and especially in the most important matters of life and eternity, look for relationships, implications and applications. For example, when considering the Bible's teaching about God being holy, indeed that he is most holy, in Hebrew terminology, holy, holy, holy, look for what that means in many related aspects of life. Ask, "What does God's being most holy mean for how I treat other people whom he also loves and who bear his image?"

To help us make those connections, most of the PowerPoint slides in this course will have two columns:

Doctrinal Subject

Biblical basis, texts

Meaning and Practical Benefits

Implications and applications

As you read and study, think about connections and inferences. This course is designed to help us do so.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Infinite, Transcendent

“The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,
⁶who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?” (Psalm 113:4-6)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Because God is transcendent, over all, and infinite, he has no limitations and thus no needs.
 1. Regarding his being: he is perfect and unlimited in every way, e.g., all-knowing (or omniscient); all-powerful (or omnipotent); all-wise; totally good; all-loving; completely righteous; and as will also be explained below, holy, holy, holy.
(Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 32:4; Job 38-39; Psalm 18:30; 139; Isaiah 6:3; 10:13; 25:1; 40:26; 50:2; Jeremiah 51:15; Revelation 4:8)
- + Nothing can control or interfere with him; he sees what is going on all over the world; he sees our needs and he is able to help us; he accomplishes all his purposes. (Isaiah 55:11)
- + He is in full control of everything; we need have no anxiety. (Philippians 4:6)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Infinite, Transcendent

“The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,

⁶who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?”
(Psalm 113:4-6)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

2. Regarding time: he is eternal; he is above time and not subject to its limitations.
(Psalm 90:2; 102:12; 25-28)
 - + God will never grow old, become feeble, and die. He will always “be here for us.”
 - + No one can ever “get rid of God.”
 - + He will never be succeeded by a malevolent being.
 - + We will never be alone, no matter where we are on earth or in space. (Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Infinite, Transcendent

- “The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens.
⁵Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,
⁶who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?” (Psalm 113:4-6)
- “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

3. Regarding space: he is everywhere present, or omnipresent, and even beyond the universe. (Psalm 113:4-6; 139:7-12; 2 Chronicles 2:6)
 - a. There is nowhere in the cosmos we can go that God is not already there (and been there from everlasting) to help us. Neither does he just “show up.” He’s already here!
 - b. Nothing can contain, confine, or be confused with God. He is not one with his creation. He, not his creation, is to be worshiped.
 - c. When problems arise and people ask, “Where is God in all this?” ask them, “What is one thing that occurred today that you value, that you see as good?” Then ask them, “What else do you see that is good?” If a person has difficulty seeing anything good, help him or her by making suggestions of the many, even countless, ones surrounding him or her, e.g., “Are you breathing pain free? Do you have a loved one? How about the sun?” Then remind him or her of James 1:17, saying, “In all these ways, there you see the hand of God.”

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Immanent

As we have just seen in the preceding slides, God is transcendent. Nevertheless, he reveals in his Word that he is also always immanent. This reality about God is unique to the Biblical faith.

- “He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the needy from the ash heap, ⁸To make *them* sit with princes, With the princes of His people. ⁹He makes the barren woman abide in the house As a joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 113:7-9 NASB)
- “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,” (Psalm 46:1-2)
- “and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20; cf. Deuteronomy 31:8; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- All other religions view their god or whatever is divine as either transcendent or immanent but not both. For example, Deism and Islam see God as transcendent even to the extent of being aloof and uninvolved with humans or our condition. The religions whose gods are in the world, e.g., Hinduism, are part of the world and act like humans but are not transcendent. The Bible reveals that God is both transcendent and immanent.
- Because God is immanent, he is with us; he is involved in our lives; he knows what we need; and he is ready and able to help us. (Psalm 46:1) Because of his transcendence, which we studied earlier (e.g., Psalm 113:4-6), he is fully capable of supplying all we need.
- In his immanence, we see him in a loving, caring relationship with his people. He is with us in all the difficult times we experience and helps us cope with, manage well, and overcome those difficulties, and even emerge from them stronger.
- You never have to wonder where God is when challenging times occur. He is right there with you. Ask him to help you, and then be confident that he will, and even already is!

Original Hebrew of Genesis 1:1

1.1. בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

hā'āreṣ wě'ēt haššāmayim ēt 'ēlōhîm bārā' bĕrē'sît

the earth and the heavens * God created In the beginning

* A primary particle indicating the accusative case (grammatical case that marks the direct objective of the verb) in Hebrew and is not translated.

The Hebrew text, not the transliteration or the translation, is from [The Lexham Hebrew Bible](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

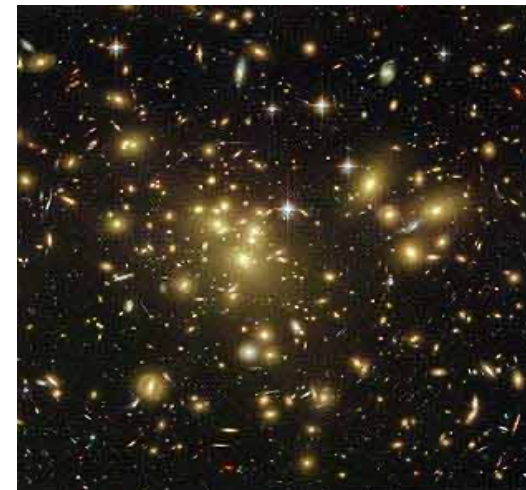
God Is Creator

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

- Only God creates. In the Bible God is the sole subject of the verb to create, בָּרָא (*bārā*), i.e., to make something without using a preexistent substance (ex nihilo, out of nothing).
- God has always existed. There has never been a time when God did not exist.
- No other being is ever the subject of *bārā*, which is why in the light of his revelation of who he is, what he is like, and what he does, I maintain it is important to classify this characteristic of God as one of his incommunicable attributes.
- “He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.” (Psalm 147:4) God knows each of the one trillion stars in the Abell 1689 galaxy (hubblesite photo at the right); we have all we can do to name whole galaxies usually just with numbers and letters.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

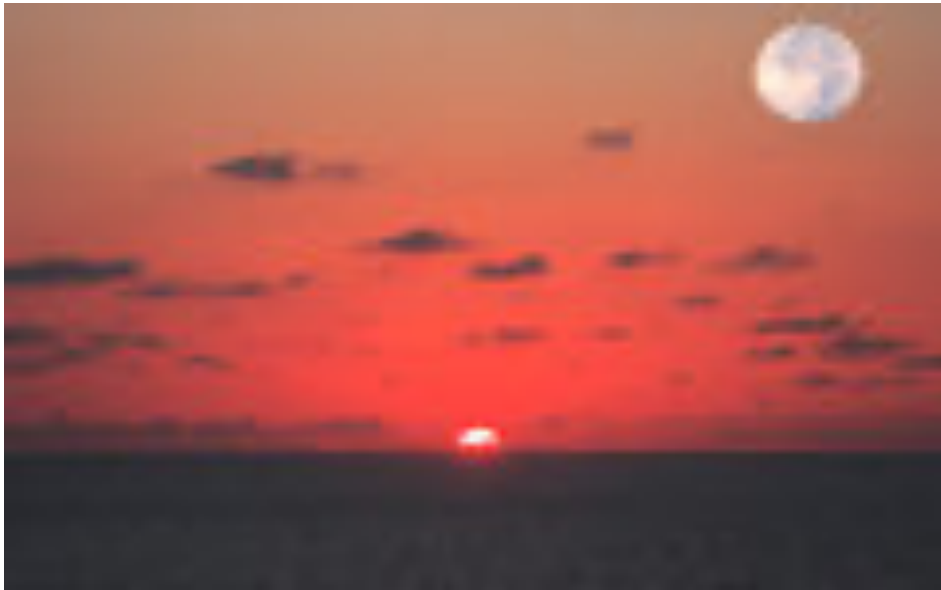
- That God is so great and the only one in the whole cosmos who can create something out of nothing, we are assured that he can always supply anything we now, or ever will, need.
- We are comforted by knowing that no malevolent being can make something out of nothing that would harm us.



Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Creator

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)



Meaning and Practical Benefits

- While God formed the universe by creating many things out of nothing, he also used some of those things to make others. For example, in Genesis 1:16 we read that God had made (translating the verb, אָסָאָה [‘*āsāh*] to make, as being in the pluperfect tense) the sun and the moon (implied in 1:3-5, “Let there be light....”).
- And God has given much of it to us to enjoy yet as caretakers. (Genesis 1:26-29)
- True scientific research helps us discover countless aspects of God’s general revelation, that which he has built into his creation for all to see (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20).

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Creator

- “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)
- When, in Genesis 1 the Hebrew word, יום (*yôm*, day), is interpreted as an indefinite period of time, as it is sometimes used elsewhere in the Bible, rather than a twenty-four-hour period, as it is also used elsewhere in holy Scripture, we typically see the Bible’s account of God’s creative acts occurring as scientists have discovered in their careful research.

Meaning and Practical Benefits



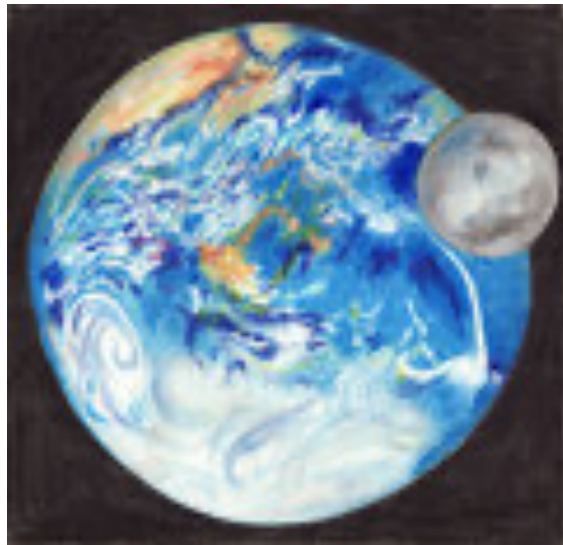
Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

According to analysis of lunar rock samples brought back from the Apollo moon mission, the earth existed for some 340,000,000 years without the moon but with conditions too inhospitable to permit life, such as too heavy and thick an atmosphere. From evidence discovered, astronomers believe that about 4.25 billion years ago a body at least the size of Mars and one-ninth the mass of Earth struck our planet almost head-on, becoming absorbed for the most part into Earth. That blast propelled the thick atmosphere into outer space, and replaced it with an atmosphere and other elements that would permit life as we know it; made a cloud of material that would coalesce to form the moon; slowed Earth's rotation to a rate that would permit life; and stabilized the tilt of Earth's rotation axis to protect the planet from climatic extremes that would extinguish life.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Creator

- “God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.” (Genesis 1:16)



Meaning and Practical Benefits

Astrophysicist Hugh Ross, a Christian, observes that “this amazing collision, for which we have an abundance of circumstantial evidence, appears to have been perfectly timed and designed to transform Earth from a ‘formless and empty’ place into a site where life could survive and thrive...the number of conditions that must be fine-tuned—and the degree of fine-tuning needed for each of these conditions—for life to possibly survive that is manifested in this single event argues powerfully on its own for a divine Creator. Even if the universe contains as many as 10 billion trillion (10^{22}) planets, we would not expect even one, by natural processes alone, to end up with the surface gravity, surface temperature, atmospheric composition, atmospheric pressure, crustal iron abundance, tectonics, vulcanism, rotation rate, rate of decline in rotation rate, and stable rotation axis tilt necessary for the support of life. To those who express the desire to see a miracle, we can assure them they are looking at one whenever they gaze up at the moon.”

Theology: The Doctrine of God

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

Who is God; what is he like; what
has he done; and what is he doing?

God's **Communicable** Characteristics

Theology: What Are God's Communicable Characteristics?

The outstanding Dutch minister and theologian, Wilhelmus à Brakel, has well-written that all God's attributes "are equally incommunicable as far as their [essence] is concerned. This distinction [between incommunicable and communicable characteristics] is merely made for the purpose of comparison. God has created man in His image and likeness....This does not imply that...a sinner becomes divine and is a partaker of the very being and attributes of God." (89-90)

What the Scripture means by man being created in the image of God, is that some attributes of God's being, which he has in macrocosm, he has built into us in microcosm; these attributes are called God's communicable characteristics. They are attributes of God in which we see a small resemblance in human beings. God's communicable characteristics, or attributes, include his being a living being; his holiness; knowledge; wisdom; love, grace, mercy, forbearance; righteousness; truth; sovereignty; power.

A brief explanation and an indication of the practical blessings of these attributes will be presented in this section. We will return to his communicable characteristics when we study the image of God in the doctrine of anthropology.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

The Triune God: The Only Living God Is Spirit and Personal, Engages in Relationships

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD...For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.” (Psalm 139:1-4; 13-18)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

God is a personal being. We read in Psalm 139:1, “...you know me.” The Hebrew word is יָדָע (*yādhaʿ*); it is a covenant word meaning to know intimately, personally, relationally. God knows us intimately; he doesn't just know about us. Even before our birth, he knew us, and he interacts with individuals. (Psalm 139:1-18; Jeremiah 1:4-10) He communicates with his people, listening to what they say and genuinely changes circumstances according to their requests which accord with his perfect will. (Exodus 3; 1 John 3:21-22; 5:13-15)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

The Triune God: The Only Living God Is Spirit and Personal, Engages in Relationships

- “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15)
- “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)
- “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4:30)
- “[Grace in Christ Jesus]...has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Timothy 1:9-10)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- God has feelings. He grieves when his holy children die. (Psalm 116:15; John 11:35) He also grieves when we sin. (Ephesians 4:30) He loves us, having done so even before we loved him. (Romans 5:6-11; John 15:13)
- The one true God has destroyed death. (2 Timothy 1:9-10)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Holy, Holy, Holy

- “In the year [740 B.C.] that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’” (Isaiah 6:1-3)
- “Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’” (Revelation 4:8)
- "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'" (Leviticus 19:2)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Holy means separated from, uncommon, pure, upright. Essentially, it means separate from the sin and evil of the world.
- The Hebrew grammar, lacking the superlative, expresses the concept of “most” or “greatest” by repeating the word three times.
- His holiness is the only one of God’s attributes that is repeated three times.
- Even though our language can express the superlative, repeating holy, holy, holy when addressing God in prayer helps us sense this aspect of God’s character in a very special way. Try it!
- Since God is love to the core of his being, it is encouraging to include God’s being most holy in the context of his love. (1 John 4:8 “...God is love.”) For example, in the praise part of our prayers we can say, “Dear triune God, holy, holy, holy and all love, including most gracious, most merciful, and most patient are you alone!”

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Holy, Holy, Holy

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- "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'" (Leviticus 19:2)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Understanding God’s holiness and the holiness he requires of his people is a key to understanding many of his laws, teachings, and actions in the Bible, e.g., why he will not allow that which is sinful or evil in his presence. We must remember, and help others know, that we come into God’s presence on his terms, not on our terms.
- **Corporate implications:** Many people saunter lackadaisically into God’s sanctuary for worship without sensing God’s being holy, holy, holy; they view God as a pal, almost as a peer, their great friend in the sky (“the man upstairs”), and with an attitude that God should be glad they showed up. Many act disrespectfully toward God. Consider, e.g., how they dress (immodestly), laughing with each other during worship, using electronic devices for other than worship, drinking coffee and eating.
- **Questions for Reflection and Discussion:** What other examples can you cite? How can we help people to keep in mind that God is holy, holy, holy and act accordingly in his worship in his sanctuary?

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Holy, Holy, Holy

- “In the year [740 B.C.] that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’” (Isaiah 6:1-3)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Understanding God’s holiness and the holiness he requires of his people is a key to understanding many of his laws, teachings, and actions in the Bible, e.g., why he will not allow that which is sinful or evil in his presence.
- **Individual implications:** Almost all of the problems people have could have been avoided if they kept God’s being most holy in their consciousness and obeyed his law. They would not have done what they did that resulted in such a painful situation, e.g., the couple who have been committing adultery. The woman is despondent that her paramour will not divorce his wife and marry her, and she has low sense of self-worth.
- **A Question for Reflection and Discussion:** How can we help people to keep in mind that God is holy, holy, holy and act accordingly in their lives?

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Holy, Holy, Holy

[Put yourself in the context of this passage and read it with the tone of voice of the apostle John and the four living creatures.]

“Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’” (Revelation 4:8-11)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Notice the additional meaning of the three-fold praise, “glory and honor and power.” The numbers in Revelation are also symbolic; three is a spiritual number.
- Since our triune God is holy, holy, holy, and he does not permit that which is sinful and evil to come into his presence, he makes it possible for us who are sinners (Romans 3:23) to enter his presence and have communion and communicate with him by being credited with Christ’s righteousness through faith. (Romans 4)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Love: Always Expressed in Action

- “You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.” (Psalm 86:5)
- “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- The word used in Psalm 86:5, translated love is **חֶסֶד** (*chesedh*), a major Hebrew term in the Old Testament that denotes God’s love as an enduring commitment of his love, often translated as steadfast love.
- The word love in the Greek of 1 John 4:8 is **ἀγάπη** (*agapē*), which Paul defines as being patient; kind; not envious, boastful, proud, rude, self-seeking, easily angered, or delighting in evil; but instead rejoicing with the truth and always protecting, trusting, and persevering. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Love: Always Expressed in Action

- “But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.” (Psalm 13:5)
- “For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” (Psalm 100:5)
- “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NASB)
- “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- German theologian Emil Brunner explained that “The Love of God...*Agape*...does not seek value, but it creates value or gives value; it does not desire to get but to give; it is not ‘attracted’ by some lovable quality, but it is poured out on those who are worthless and degraded...Here the One who loves does not seek anything for Himself; all He desires is to benefit the one He loves. And the benefit He wants to impart is not ‘something’, but His very Self, for this Love is...self-giving to the other, to whom love is directed.” (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, 186-187)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Love: Always Expressed in Action

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Brunner makes that statement on the preceding slide in the context of his observation that God’s love must be seen in connection with his holiness, which he rightly refers to as an indissoluble connection, “the characteristic and decisive element” in the Christian understanding of God.
- To understand the love of God as fully as possible, we must keep in mind his holiness, his justice, and our sinfulness, three subjects we’ll explore more in upcoming sections.
- A woman said, “My earthly father was horrible and terribly abused me. If God is a Father, I don’t want anything to do with him.” We need to help such people know the truth about God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is perfect and all love. Think how the Biblical understanding of God could help her!

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Love: His Love Includes Feelings.

In Exodus 3 God tells Moses that

- “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about יָדָה (*yādha*), their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them....” (Exodus 3:7-8)
- “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- An examination of the original Hebrew in which God is speaking to Moses, the English words, “I am concerned about their suffering” are in the Hebrew, “I know their pain.” The root word for “I know” is יָדָה (*yādha*), a covenantal word meaning to know in an intimate, personal, relational, experiential manner, a term that involves a thorough and complete knowing due to an intimate loving relationship.
- He cares deeply for his people and plans to relieve them of their pain, their suffering, through Moses’ leading them out of Egypt to the land God was giving them. Because God loves and cares, he acts accordingly.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Love: His Love Includes Feelings.

- “In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer. This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.” (Isaiah 54:8-10 NRSV)
- “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness,…” (Romans 3:23-25 NASB)
- “...also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” (Romans 4:24–25)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- We read in the Bible of God’s anger, even wrath. Yet that wrath is due to his love for people who are being unjustly victimized or who are acting in ways that are very counterproductive to their own spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being or counter to God’s will, i.e., counter to what he sees as ultimately best for everyone, all of which offends his holiness. God removes his wrath from those whose faith in Christ Jesus credits them/us with his justice, his righteousness. As we see in this section and especially in our study of Christology, soteriology, and eschatology, God will bring justice, even now when the time is right in his sight, and in the final judgment when Jesus Christ returns in his Second Coming.
- We are assured in God’s Word through Isaiah and others that God’s love will always remain with us.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Sovereign

a. God's Sovereign Will

"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted." (Job 42:2)

"When I act, who can reverse it?"
(Isaiah 43:13)

b. God's Sovereign Power

+ "Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" (Matthew 19:26)

+ "Christ...far above all rule and authority, power and dominion...And God placed all things under his feet..." (Ephesians 1:17-22a)

+ "[Jesus said] I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- God's sovereignty involves two dimensions: his sovereign will and his sovereign power. The former is the exercise of God's authority to accomplish what pleases him, what he sees is best for all, and achieve his purposes. His sovereign power is his total and complete ability to produce what he wills without being thwarted by any being or circumstance in all creation, including artificial intelligence (AI). (Job 42:2) How very comforting! What God purposes and promises he provides. What God says, he can deliver. Talk about Biblical theology being practical!
- God is not dependent on anything; on the contrary, all God's creation is dependent on him. God can and does take care of us, including helping us overcome adversity, especially those who remain faithful to him. We don't have to worry. Believe that reality and sleep well!
- Due to the sovereignty of God, his believers do not need alcoholic beverages, opioid drugs, or other substance abuse to calm nerves and "get through" worrisome thoughts and experiences such as AI or a plane trip and times on the trip, e.g., excessive turbulence.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is Sovereign

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

- As a communicable characteristic, God has given humans a smaller and limited amount of sovereignty as part of creating us in his image, e.g., in his command that we subdue the earth and rule over the living creatures as stewards of God's creation. (Genesis 1:28-29)
- An important part of our stewardship includes being responsible. With any privilege comes responsibility; therefore, when we use our God-given ability to make something, such as in gain-of-function research, artificial intelligence, or anything else, God will hold us accountable for controlling what we have made so that it contributes positively to his creation and serves his purposes. What we produce must not in and of itself negatively affect God's creation.
- Compounding the challenge is the sinfulness of human nature, whereby something good is used for evil, which we'll examine in our study of Biblical anthropology.
- Yet, thanks be to God, he has revealed that he loves us, is sovereign, and everything is under his control.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

God Is the Owner

- Because God made them he owns the cattle on a thousand hills; "...the world is mine, and all that is in it," the Psalmist sang of God. (Psalm 50:10-12)
- Because God made us, "we are his" as he reveals in Psalm 100:3.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- We belong to him, as does everything else. What great comfort this gives us! Social science research confirms what we intuitively sense, that belonging is one of the most important of human needs. No greater blessing exists than to know we belong to the Owner of the universe, and that he loves us.
- The next time you feel overwhelmed by a problem, meditate on these words from the catechism and most of all the Scripture texts upon which they are based. Resist the temptation to view your difficulty with tunnel vision. Put the situation in the fullest perspective: you are not in it alone.
- Remember that you belong to the One who has redeemed and lays claim to you.

Theology: The Doctrine of God

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

Who is God; what is he like; what
has he done; and what is he doing?

Key Aspects of God's Other Work

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

Key Aspects of God's Other Work

See the larger PowerPoint presentation of this lesson for these subjects:

- God's Election and Predestination
- God and the Good Angels
- God versus the Evil Angels
- Discerning God's Will
- God's Providence
- What Does It Mean to Fear God?

For More Information

In order to facilitate course preparation, the slides in this presentation on Biblical Theology have been selected from the larger [overview](#) of Theology, which itself has been drawn from the Theology section of the original and unabridged version of the PowerPoint program (PPT), [*Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God’s Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity.*](#)

This abridged PPT is still larger than can be covered in an average one-class session, particularly in the West. Therefore, highlighting of especially essential parts is offered to help when time is very limited.

For further information about the subjects on the Theology slides in this abridged program, see the additional slides in the Theology section that are on the original and unabridged presentation, which is located on the [Christian Theology](#) page of the author’s free and secure [general Website](#). See also other documents on the Christian Theology page that supply additional information.

For More Information

This PowerPoint presentation (PPT) is an abridged version of the accompanying larger [overview](#) of Theology. Ask the class to read the larger overview prior to the class meeting. Provide opportunities for questions, comments, and discussion of any of the subjects in the larger version, this abridged version, or related subjects, especially contemporary implications and applications of the Biblical content.

Each of the PPTs, in this introductory course on historic Christian systematic theology, is written in an expanded sentence outline format in order to provide a stand-alone resource for teachers, students, and those who want to have the PPT for independent study or devotional use. The last session of the course includes redoing the matching task ([Lesson One](#)), discussion of any subject the class wants to address further, or any related topic for which time was not available in previous sessions.