

A Brief Survey of the Doctrine of God

To attempt to give a definition, let alone an adequate theology, of God is not an easy task, nor should it be done lightly or flippantly. I will attempt to lay out a Biblical doctrine of God that brings Him honor and His due glory. The ancient Hebrews honored the name of God, and I will seek to pay the same reverence to His doctrine. After all, what kind of son would I be if I did not show the utmost honor to my Father?

I. Triune

God is Triune (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) but is still *One*. Each Person of the Trinity is God, but they are not three gods. Each Person is not 1/3 that adds up to one, but they are each one that adds up to *One*.¹ The Triune God is One but is made up of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a doctrine that cannot be fully grasped by our finite minds and must be held in mystery. Even though we are unable to *fully* grasp the doctrine of the Trinity, this in no way makes this a secondary doctrine. The Trinity is the only way to understand the incarnation of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit, which are both central to the faith. And lastly, the Trinity distinguishes Christianity from all other religions, specifically Judaism and Islam.² Simply put, without the Trinity, Christianity cannot function.

A. *The Father*³

Though there is no superiority of one person over another in the Trinity, there still is an order, of which the Father is first. Scripture says that Christ is the Son of God the Father, and the Spirit flows out of the Father and the Son. In the economy of the Trinity, it is the Father who sent Christ as well as the Holy Spirit, but the Father Himself is sent by no one.⁴ The Father is the sender of His Son, who is His image, and the Holy Spirit, who is His Spirit, and in all of this they are all One and not three separate.⁵

¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume One*, 270

² *Ibid.*, 262

³ There are several arguments for why God should be preferred as “Mother”. I have found these arguments to be lacking Biblically. I recommend the article “Seven Reasons We Cannot Call God “Mother”” by Randy Stinson & Christopher W. Cowan which can be accessed at http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/stinson_cowan_2004_seven_reasons_why_we_cannot_call_god_mother.pdf

⁴ John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* reprint, (Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2004), 160

⁵ Colossians 1:15, 1 Corinthians 3:16 & 6:11

The Scriptures speak of God the Father as the Elector of those who shall receive His mercy from judgment.⁶ To use a modern analogy, the Father is the playwright of the cosmic performance that is being played out on the stage of the world. Every detail has been written, foreordained, by His very hand in His script.⁷ All that has taken place and will take place was decreed by the Father.⁸ The Father is the master playwright, architect and designer.

B. *The Son*

The Son is God and equal with the Father. As John 1 explains, “The Word was with God and the Word was God.”⁹ Contra to the Arians, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, etc., Christ is fully God, uncreated and eternal.¹⁰ Through the incarnation, the Son took on human flesh and blood, becoming the God/Man. Contra to the Gnostics, Christ was fully man and fully God when He walked the earth.¹¹

Christ took on a human nature to fulfill the Law and die in place of those that are elected unto salvation. In the analogy of a play/performance, Christ is the star of the show, the leading role. All of history before His coming looked toward His arrival, and all of history now looks toward His return. Christ is the only means to access God the Father,¹² and His importance cannot be overstated. Unless one comes through Christ, there is no access to God the Father.¹³ Christ is the centerpiece of Christianity, and it can be said that He is the centerpiece of the Trinity.

C. *The Holy Spirit*

As with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is God and like the Father and the Son, He has a distinct personality and role. In explaining to His disciples, the Spirit’s purpose, Jesus said, “When the Spirit of truth

⁶ Ephesians 1:3-6, Romans 9:14-18 & 1 Peter 1:1-2

⁷ Isaiah 46:10, Acts 2:23 & 1 Peter 1:1-2

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. Two: God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 372

⁹ John 1:1 Holman Christian Standard Bible

¹⁰ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Volume 1: The Early Years* reprint (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), 80
John 1:1; 8:58, Colossians 1:15-20 and Philippians 2:5-6

¹¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith* Chapter VIII Para. III

¹² John 14:6

¹³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Erasmus Middleton, ed. John Prince Fallows (Grand Rapids: Kregel Classics, 1979), 7-8

comes, He will guide you into all the truth.”¹⁴ This truth that Christ speaks of is more than just propositional truth, but the very truth of Christ Himself. Paul explains this further by stating, “no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵ The Holy Spirit’s chief operations are revealing Christ,¹⁶ applying His atonement, regenerating hearts,¹⁷ fostering holiness,¹⁸ giving spiritual gifts,¹⁹ and producing spiritual fruit in the Christian.²⁰

In the analogy of the cosmic play/performance, the Holy Spirit is the director of the production. He makes sure that the human actors and actresses play their parts and that the plan of the playwright, God the Father, is followed to the smallest detail. He also casts the human players in the performance, taking them from degenerate hacks and transforming them into seraphic thespians. The Holy Spirit, as director, also makes sure that the star of the show, Jesus, is given center stage and that His lines are clear and audible to all in the audience and on stage.

II. Attributes

As I have stated above at the beginning, there is so much that I can write regarding the doctrine of God. I have chosen to only focus on a handful of the attributes of God. Noticeably the love of God is absent from the following list of attributes. This is because God’s love deserves a paper all its own.

A. *Eternal & Immutable*

The foundational attributes of God are His eternity and His immutability. God does not merely exist eternally, but He is *eternity* itself. There is nothing eternal in and of itself outside of God.²¹ The concept of time and space is connected with this world, which was created by God and has no bearing on Him.²² God

¹⁴ John 16:13 Holman Christian Standard Bible

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:3 Holman Christian Standard Bible

¹⁶ John 16:14

¹⁷ Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 168-169

¹⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. Four: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 251

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

²⁰ Galatians 5:22-23

²¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. Two*, 160-164

²² Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume One*, 202-204

exists in the forever past, in the forever present and in the forever future, all of which is a constant *now* for God.²³

Flowing from God's eternity is His immutability. God does not change and is eternally the same.²⁴ Mutability is the result of the finitude and flaws of humanity such as a lack of "wisdom", information, and insight, all of which God is not afflicted with by His nature.²⁵ Whatever God has purposed will come to pass, and there is nothing and no one that can stop His plans.²⁶

B. Sovereign & Independent

Why do I know that I can trust in the Bible's accuracy? Because God is sovereign.²⁷ How do I know that I will endure trials, temptations, and arrive at the New Heaven and the New Earth? Because God is sovereign.²⁸ How can I stay sane and secure in a post-9/11 world of terrorism, movie theater shootings, economic crisis and outbreaks of acute diseases? I stay sane because of the sovereignty of God.²⁹ He is sovereign over *all* that has happened, is happening and will happen. He is in complete control of *everything*, no exceptions.³⁰ "God does everything he wills; he does not will anything without doing it, but what he wills he does, and what happens does not ever happen apart from his will."³¹ Even though God is not the *author* of sin, my personal sins (and everyone else's) are still under His sovereign hand and work out for His glory.³² This is a hard doctrine to grasp, but the Scriptures attest to this thoroughly.³³

²³ John L. Dagg, *Manuel of Theology* reprint (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 65

²⁴ Malachi 3:6, 1 Samuel 15:29, & Hebrews 13:8. Verses like Exodus 32:14 which speak of God "relenting", "repenting", "changing", etc. must be understood as there not being a change in God, His nature, or even His plan but how the plan is worked out.

²⁵ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* reprint, (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1957), 69

²⁶ Daniel 4:34-35

²⁷ Bavinck. *Reformed Dogmatics Volume One*, 426-427

²⁸ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume Two: Eleventh Through Seventeenth Topics*, trans.

George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1994), 596

²⁹ Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 219-221 & 226-227

³⁰ Jerry Bridges, "Does Divine Sovereignty Make a Difference in Everyday Life?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*. ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 297-299

³¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. Three: Sin And Salvation in Christ*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 60

³² Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Volume 1*, 61

Genesis 20:6-7, Exodus 9:12, 2 Chronicles 18:22 and 2 Timothy 2:25

³³ Psalm 103:19, Proverbs 20:24, Proverbs 21:1, Isaiah 45:5-7, Jeremiah 10:23, Amos 3:6, and Daniel 4:34-35

Connected with God's sovereignty is His independence. God needs nothing and is independent of everything. Anything that He has created is out of His *good pleasure* as opposed to a need.³⁴ All that has been created and will be created owes its very creation and continued existence to God alone, but God does not share that dependence. He alone stands completely independent from the universe, never in need because "Need is a creature-word and cannot be spoken of the Creator."³⁵

C. *Holy & Perfect*

The holiness of God and His perfection are interrelated to one another.³⁶ God's holiness attests to the purity of His nature and being; God's perfection affirms that there is no defect within Him.³⁷ The two attributes can be seen as interchangeable as Jesus said in the book of Matthew, "Be perfect... as your heavenly Father is perfect."³⁸ Perfection is holiness, being set apart from the imperfect and impure, and holiness is walking in perfection. Both attributes are rooted in the being of God.³⁹

D. *Mercy & Justice (Wrath)*

God is merciful and His mercy is spread across creation.⁴⁰ His mercy can be seen with Adam and Eve not dying instantly as Ananias and Sapphira did.⁴¹ Cain also received the mercy of God instead of the death he deserved.⁴² This mercy can be seen more practically every day in the fact that God sends the rain to water the crops of the righteous and the wicked alike.⁴³ It should not be taken for granted or looked at as a right, because God gives mercy to whomever He sovereignly wills.⁴⁴ His mercy cannot be earned or deserved; it is given out of His good pleasure and for His glory.

³⁴ Psalm 50:7-15

³⁵ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 32

³⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. Two*, 219

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 219 & 250

³⁸ Matthew 5:48 Holman Christian Standard Bible, also see Matthew 19:21 in the Holman Christian Standard Bible

³⁹ Psalm 99:3-9, Isaiah 5:15-16, Deuteronomy 32:4, and 2 Samuel 22:31

⁴⁰ Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 85

⁴¹ Genesis 3:19-21 compared with Acts 5:1-11

⁴² Genesis 4:10-16 compared with Genesis 9:5-6

⁴³ Matthew 5:45

⁴⁴ Romans 9:14-15, 18

The justice (wrath) of God is central to His being. Justice should be understood as “to give everyone his due.”⁴⁵ As Romans 1-3 lays out clearly, all of humanity is under the sway and bondage of sin and deserve death and hell as their “due”.⁴⁶ The only thing that God owes us is justice, the punishment for our sin and sins.⁴⁷ God’s justice is fueled by His holiness, which cannot tolerate sin and impurity.⁴⁸ How can a Holy God permit sin and evil to go unpunished?⁴⁹ If a human judge were to let a confessed serial killer go without paying for his heinous crimes, we would call for the judge’s resignation and the conviction of the criminal. Why should it be any different with the God of the universe?⁵⁰ The wrath of God upholds justice and brings Him glory.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Dagg, *Manuel of Theology*, 84

⁴⁶ Especially Romans 1:18-19, 32; 2:5,8 & 3:9-18

⁴⁷ Sin = Sin nature & Sins = Actual sins committed by each individual

⁴⁸ The wrath of God must not be understood as how human wrath is understood. God is not subject to passion and impulsive behavior. His wrath is always justice and right.

⁴⁹ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 88-93

⁵⁰ D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?: Reflections On Suffering and Evil 2nd Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 100

⁵¹ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man” in *Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockam*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1956), 120