

CHAPTER TWO: GOD AND THE HOLY TRINITY

The Attributes of God

1. There is but one, and only one, living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in His being and His perfections. None but He can comprehend or understand His essence. He is pure spirit, invisible, and without body, parts, or the changeable feelings of men. He alone possesses immortality, and dwells amid the light insufferably bright to mortal men. He never changes. He is great beyond all our conceptions, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty and infinite. He is most holy, wise, free and absolute. All that He does is the out-working of His changeless, righteous will, and for His own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful and compassionate. He abounds in goodness and truth. He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. He rewards those who seek Him diligently. But He hates sin. He will not overlook guilt or spare the guilty, and He is perfectly just in executing judgment.

(a) “There is but one, and only one, living and true God”: Deuteronomy 4:35, 6:4, Isaiah 43:10, Jeremiah 10:10, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 Timothy 2:5. This is opposed to polytheism. There can only be one Being called ‘God’. He is “living” as opposed to idols that do not have life (Psalm 115:3-7). He is “true” as opposed to gods of men’s imagination (Deuteronomy 32:17, Galatians 4:8).

(b) God is “self-existent”: Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 48:12, Acts 17:24-25. God is independent of every other being, and needs no creature to supply Him with anything. It is wrong to say that God *needs* us in any way whatsoever; it is we who are totally dependent upon Him!

(c) God is “infinite in His being and perfections”: 1 Kings 8:27, Psalm 90:2, 1 Timothy 1:17. He is unbounded, unlimited, both in space = omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-12, Jeremiah 23:23-24), and in time = eternal, and is without beginning or end (Psalm 102:25-27, Isaiah 57:15).

(d) God is “a pure spirit”: Deuteronomy 4:15-18, Luke 24:39, John 4:24, Acts 14:11,15, 1 Timothy 1:17. God is without “body” or “parts”. So if the Bible says God has a mouth, for example, it is ‘anthropomorphic’ language = referring to God as if He is a man. This is the only way we can understand God. It is said that God reveals words to us, but the only way we know that can be done is through a mouth. God is also without “the changeable feelings of men”. So that when Scripture says God is angry, for example, it is referring to the passion men would have if they are in the same situation.

(e) God cannot be fully understood: Job 11:7-9, 26:14, Psalm 145:3, Romans 11:33-34. We only know as much about God as He has been pleased to reveal. As creatures it is impossible for us to understand Him fully. How can finite creatures understand One who is infinite or eternal or triune?

(f) God is “most holy” and “dwells amid the light insufferably bright to mortal men”. God’s holiness is first His separation above His creatures: Isaiah 6:3, 57:15, 1 Timothy 6:16. Everything about God is holy because He is infinitely exalted above us in everything; for example, His Name = God as He reveals Himself, is holy (Psalm 111:9). Second and specifically, God is holy because He is separated from all sin: Habakkuk 1:13, 1 Peter 1:15-16. We must always approach God with reverence because of His holiness.

(g) God “never changes”: Exodus 3:14, Numbers 23:19, Malachi 3:6, James 1:17. God Himself does not change. His purposes do not change (Psalm 33:11). What then does it mean when the Bible says God ‘repented’ or ‘relented’ (Exodus 32:14, 2 Samuel 24:16, Jeremiah 26:19, Jonah 3:10)? God is the lawgiver and ruler of men, and He rewards those who obey, and punishes those who disobey. If men change towards God, then God’s dealings with them change accordingly (Jeremiah 18:5-11). God Himself is not changing, but He is doing what He promised He would do in those particular circumstances. If God never changes, then His promises never change, and this must encourage us to always trust in Him.

(h) God is “wise”: Daniel 2:20, Romans 11:33, 16:27, Ephesians 3:10, Colossians 2:3. God is all-wise because He is omniscient = knows everything (Job 37:16, Psalm 139:1-6, Isaiah 40:28, Romans 11:33). Wisdom is the application of knowledge, knowing the best thing to do, and the best way of doing it. God is wise because He receives the greatest glory from all that He does, both in creation (Psalm 19:1), and in redemption (Romans 11:36). Was God wise in letting sin come in to spoil His good creation? Even if we cannot get a full answer, we must admit that God is wise because He will be glorified both in those who are saved and in those who are lost (Romans 9:22-24). Since God is wise in all His dealings let us learn to trust Him in everything for all things will glorify Him and will thus be to the good of His people (Romans 8:28).

(i) God is “free and absolute”: Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11. God is free because He does what He wants to do (Psalm 115:3). His will is absolutely free. “All that He does is the out-working of His changeless, righteous will.” God is absolute because He has the right to do whatever He pleases, and there are none who can successfully challenge Him. This is further explained in section 2 of this chapter (below).

(j) God is good. “He is most loving, gracious, merciful and compassionate”: Exodus 33:18-19, 34:6, Psalm 100:5, Luke 18:19. God’s goodness is the perfection of His nature so that there is nothing lacking in Him and nothing that can be added to make Him better. All that God does is good, in creation (Genesis 1:31), provision (Psalm 145:9), and especially salvation (Titus 3:4). The various aspects of His goodness are clearly seen in salvation: God’s *love* is His goodness in giving Himself in His Son (Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:10); God’s *grace* is His goodness in showing free and unmerited favour to hell-deserving sinners (Romans 3:24, Ephesians 2:8-9); and God’s *mercy* is His goodness in giving help to sinful creatures in their misery (Ephesians 2:4, Titus 3:5). We must learn to praise the Lord in our worship for His goodness in its various aspects (Psalm 100:4-5).

(k) God is just = God acts agreeably to His own nature and perfections. God is just in giving His law, for it is righteous and perfectly suitable to our ability as He created us (Romans 7:12). Especially, God is just in the way He deals with people according to His law, as He gives to everyone what they deserve (Romans 2:6-11):

1. Positively – “He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. He rewards those who seek Him diligently”: Exodus 34:6, Hebrews 6:10, 11:6. In forgiving the sinner God is just because Christ has fully propitiated God for the sins of His people (Romans 3:25, 1 John 1:9).
2. Negatively – “He hates sin. He will not overlook guilt or spare the guilty, and He is perfectly just in executing judgment.” God must inflict the punishment that is due to sin, either in the sinner, or in Jesus as the substitute (see Exodus 34:7, Acts 17:31, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8, Revelation 16:5-7).

The Relations of God to His Creatures

2. God is all-sufficient, and all life, glory, goodness and blessedness are found in Him and in Him alone. He does not stand in need of any of His creatures that He has made, nor does He derive any part of His glory from them. On the contrary, He manifests His own glory in and by them. He is the fountain-head of all being, and the origin, channel, and end of all things. Over all His creatures He is sovereign. He uses them as He pleases, and does for them or to them all that He wills.

His sight penetrates to the heart of all things. His knowledge is infinite and infallible. No single thing is to Him at risk or uncertain, for He is not dependent upon created things.

In all His decisions, doings and demands He is most holy.

Angels and men owe to Him as their Creator all worship, service and obedience, and whatever else He may require at their hands.

(a) God's **self-sufficient independence** from His creatures (lines 1-4). It is because God is eternal and the creator of everything, that He exists by Himself and has no need of His creatures (Acts 17:24-25, Exodus 3:14, John 5:26). It is we creatures who are totally dependent upon Him. He is the originator of everything, the One through whom all things live and the One to whom everything gives glory (Romans 11:36). So everything begins and ends with God.

(b) God's **sovereign dominion** over His creatures (lines 5-6). God has made everything and therefore He owns everything, and so He has the right to do what He wants with what He has made (Psalm 109:13, 115:3, Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11). Scripture uses the illustration of the potter and the clay (Romans 9:20-21, Jeremiah 18:1-6).

(c) God's **absolute knowledge** of His creatures (lines 7-8). God's total knowledge is seen in the many detailed prophecies of the Old Testament that depended upon so many people for them to happen yet they happened exactly as they were spoken. For example, all the details surrounding the suffering of Christ in Isaiah 53. God knows even all that is in the heart of a man (1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Kings 8:39, Psalm 139:23, Hebrews 4:13). Therefore nothing happens that is a surprise to God; and nothing can be hidden from him. This is a great encouragement to the Christian especially when we cannot understand what is happening.

(d) God's **complete holiness** before His creatures (line 9). God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8), so that we must not judge His ways by ours. His ways are far above ours and always in line with His perfect character. He is never wrong; He never deceives; He is always wise (see Psalm 145:17, Revelation 15:3-4, 16:4,7).

(e) God's **total claim** upon His creatures (lines 10-11). All men belong to God because He made us, so that we exist for His glory alone (Revelation 4:11). Christians doubly belong to God because they have also been purchased from their sins by Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This is true of every aspect of our lives: in the family, at work and school, in recreation, in every place and situation; and of all the things God has given us, our lives, our possessions and our abilities.

The Trinity

3. Three divine Persons constitute the Godhead – the Father, the Son (or the Word), and the Holy Spirit. They are one in substance, in power, and in eternity. Each is fully God, and yet the Godhead is one and indivisible. The Father owes His being to none. He is the Father to the Son who is eternally begotten of Him. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

These Persons, one infinite and eternal God not to be divided in nature or in being, are distinguished in Scripture by their personal relations within the Godhead, and by the variety of works which they undertake.

Their tri-unity (that is, the Doctrine of the Trinity) is the essential basis of all our fellowship with God, and the comfort we derive from our dependence upon Him.

(a) The doctrine of the Trinity **stated** (lines 1-5). This doctrine will ever remain a mystery to the minds of men because we cannot understand how as to ‘essence’ God is one, but as to ‘persons’ God is three. False teaching has always sought to get rid of this mystery either by making God one person (Monarchianism, like the modern-day Branhamists), or by teaching that the Son and the Spirit are not God as the Father is God (Arianism, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses). The Nicene Creed refused this easy way out, and so must we.

1. There is only one God: Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Corinthians 8:6.
2. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally God:
 - [i] The *Father* – no one doubts that the Father is God.
 - [ii] The *Son* –
 - He is called God (John 1:1, 10:33, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8)
 - He possesses the divine attributes (Matthew 28:20, John 2:24-25, 5:17, 8:58, Hebrews 13:8).
 - He performs the divine works (John 1:3, 5:22, 10:28-29, Colossians 1:15-17).
 - He receives divine worship (John 5:23, Hebrews 1:6, Revelation 1:5-6).
 - [iii] The *Holy Spirit* –
 - He is called God (Isaiah 6:8-9 & Acts 28:25-26, Acts 5:3-4).
 - He possesses the divine attributes (Psalm 139:7, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, 12:11).
 - He performs the divine works (Job 33:4, John 3:6, 1 Corinthians 12:9-11).
 - He receives divine worship (2 Corinthians 13:14, Revelation 1:3-4).
3. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate Persons. Sometimes all three are together but separate (Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14). They are involved with each as Persons, speaking to each other (John 14:16, 15:26), loving (John 17:23,26).

(b) The doctrine of the Trinity **explained** (lines 6-8). The three Persons of the Godhead share the same nature or essence, but as Persons they are distinguished from each other by certain personal properties. These can only be stated but not explained:

1. The personal property of the first Person is seen in the title ‘Father’. He is eternally the Father of His only begotten Son (Ephesians 1:3).
2. The personal property of the second Person is seen in the title ‘Son’. As a person He is eternally the only begotten Son of the Father (John 1:14,18).
3. The personal property of the third Person is seen in the title ‘Spirit’. He is sent by, acts for, and reveals the Father and the Son (John 15:26).

(c) The doctrine of the Trinity **applied** (lines 9-10). The Church came to define the Trinity, not out of philosophical considerations, but out of very practical concerns. Above all they were concerned with salvation. As “basis of all our fellowship with God” the very existence of the Trinity is essential for our salvation. For example, see under the following Trinitarian passages: Ephesians 1:3-14, 1 Peter 1:2. Note that a denial of the Son involves a denial of the Father also (John 5:23, 17:3, 1 John 2:22-23).