

Who & What is God like? (Theology Proper)

Objectives

1. The Existence of God
2. The Knowability of God
3. The Character of God: “Incommunicable” & “Communicable” Attributes
4. The Doctrine of the Trinity

BFC Article 3: God the Father

3-1 There is but one living and true God, immanent, transcendent, infinite in being and perfection, pure spirit, invisible, immutable, eternal, almighty, all wise, most holy, most free, most loving, most gracious, most merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and withal most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin. He will by no means clear the guilty.

The Existence of God

- Humanity’s Inner Sense of God
 - All persons everywhere have a deep, inner sense that God exists, that they are his creatures, and that he is their Creator.
 - “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:21 ESV)
 - Scripture also recognizes that some people deny this inner sense of God and even deny that God exists.
 - “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”” (Psalms 14:1 ESV)
 - Paul also recognizes that sin will cause people to deny their knowledge of God: he speaks of those who “by their wickedness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18)
 - In the life of a Christian this inner awareness of God becomes stronger and more distinct.
 - God as our loving Father in heaven (Rom. 8:15)
 - The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God (Rom 8:16)
 - Jesus Christ living within our hearts (Eph. 3:17; Phil 3:8, 10; Col. 1:27; John 14:23).
 - The intensity of this awareness for a Christian is such that though we have not seen our Lord Jesus Christ, we indeed love him (1 Peter 1:8).
- Believing the Evidence in Scripture and Nature
 - Bible everywhere assumes that God exists.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1 ESV)

- The world also gives abundant evidence of God's existence.

"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." (Romans 1:20 ESV)

- Traditional "Proofs" for the Existence of God
 - **Cosmological argument:** every known thing in the universe has a cause.
 - **Teleological argument:** a subcategory of the cosmological argument. It focuses on the evidence of harmony, order, and design in the universe, and argues that its design gives evidence of an intelligent purpose
 - **Ontological argument:** begins with the idea of God, who is defined as a being "greater than which nothing can be imagined." It then argues that the characteristic of existence must belong to such a being, since it is greater to exist than not to exist
 - **Moral argument:** begins from man's sense of right and wrong, and of the need for justice to be done, and argues that there must be a God who is the source of right and wrong and who will someday mete out justice to all people.

The Knowability of God

- The Necessity for God to Reveal Himself to Us
 - Paul says that what can be known about God is plain to people "because God has shown it to them" (Rom. 1:19).
 - With regard to the personal knowledge of God that comes in salvation, this idea is even more explicit. Jesus says, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).
 - The Bible alone tells us how to understand the testimony about God from nature. Therefore we depend on God's active communication to us in Scripture for our true knowledge of God.
- We Can Never Fully Understand God
 - God's greatness is beyond searching out or discovering: it is too great ever to be fully known.
 - *"Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure"* (Ps. 147:5).
- We Can Never Fully Understand God (continued)
 - Paul implies this incomprehensibility of God when he says that "the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God," and then goes on to say that "no one comprehends the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:10-12).
 - This doctrine of God's incomprehensibility has much positive application for our own lives. It means that we will never be able to know "too much" about God, for we will never run out of things to learn about him, and we will thus never tire in delighting in the discovery of more and more of his excellence and of the greatness of his works.

- Yet We Can Know God Truly
 - “Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that **he understands and knows me**, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”” (Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV)
 - The fact that we do know God himself is further demonstrated by the realization that the richness of the Christian life includes a personal relationship with God.

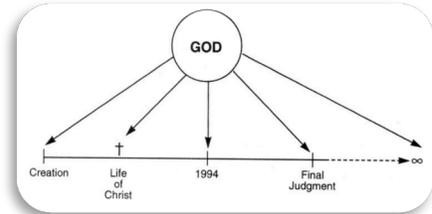
The Character of God

- Introduction: 2 ways to categorize God’s attributes
 - **Incommunicable Attributes:** Those attributes we call “incommunicable” are better defined by saying that they are attributes of God that are **less shared** by us.
 - The incommunicable attributes of God are perhaps the most easily misunderstood, probably because they represent aspects of God’s character that are **least familiar to our experience**.
 - Examples of the incommunicable attributes would be God’s eternity (God has existed for all **eternity**, but we have not), **unchangeableness** (God does not change, but we do), or **omnipresence** (God is everywhere present, but we are present only in one place at one time).
 - **Communicable Attributes:** Those attributes of God that are “communicable,” are those that are **more shared** with us than those mentioned in the previous set of attributes.
 - God’s attributes must be based on some understanding of how finely one wishes to make distinctions between various aspects of God’s character.
 - Are God’s goodness and love two attributes or one? What about knowledge and wisdom, or spirituality and invisibility?
- The Incommunicable Attributes of God (5)
 - 1) **Independence:** God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy. (Job 41:11, Ps 50:10-12, John 17:24, Rev 4:11, Ps 90:2)
 - 2) **Unchangeableness:** God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations. (Ps 102:25-27, Mal 3:6, Jam 1:17, Ps 33:11, Num 23:19, 1 Sam 15:29)

“remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from

ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' (Is 46:9-10 ESV)

- These instances should all be understood as true expressions of God's present attitude or intention with respect to the situation as it exists at that moment. Yet, in the long term would ultimately achieve his good purposes.

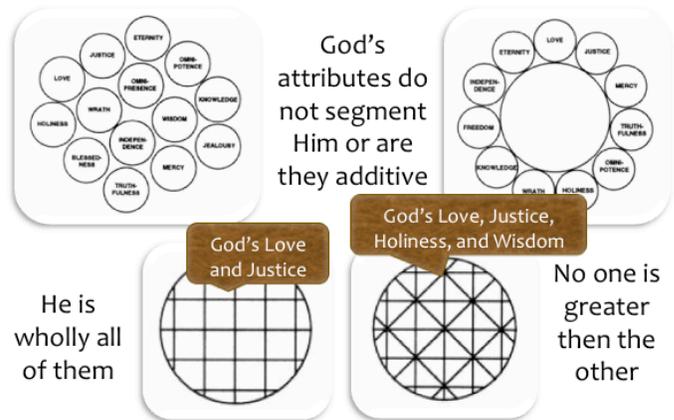


- Eternity:** God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Psa 90:2 ESV)

- Omnipresence:** God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.
- Unity:** God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times.

- God's whole being includes all of his attributes: he is entirely loving, entirely merciful, entirely just, and so forth. Every attribute of God that we find in Scripture is true of all of God's being, and we therefore can say that every attribute of God also qualifies every other attribute.



- The Communicable Attributes of God (23)

Attributes Describing God's Being

- Spirituality:** God's spirituality means that God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence.
- Invisibility:** God's total essence, all of his spiritual being, will never be able to be seen by us, yet God still shows himself to us through visible, created things.
 - In Jesus we have a unique visible manifestation of God in the New Testament that was not available to believers who saw theophanies in the Old Testament.

"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," (Heb 1:3 ESV)

Mental Attributes

- 3) **Knowledge (Omniscience):** God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act.
- 4) **Wisdom:** God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals.
- 5) **Truthfulness (and Faithfulness):** God is the true God, and that all his knowledge and words are both true and the final standard of truth.

Note: He always knows all things at once. All of these facts and all other things that he knows are always fully present in his consciousness. He does not have to reason to conclusions or ponder carefully before he answers, for he knows the end from the beginning, and he never learns and never forgets anything.

“And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Heb 4:13 ESV)

Note: Communicable in that we can in part imitate it by striving to have true knowledge about God and about his world.

Moral Attributes

- 6) **Goodness:** God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval.
 - God’s being and actions are perfectly worthy of his own approval. He is therefore the final standard of good. Jesus implies this when he says, “No one is good but God alone” (Luke 18:19).
- 7) **Love:** God eternally gives of himself to others.

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8 ESV)
- 8-10) **Mercy, Grace, Patience:** God’s goodness when it is used for the benefit of specific classes of people.
 - **Mercy:** God’s goodness toward those in misery and distress.
 - **Grace:** God’s goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.
 - **Patience:** God’s goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time.
- 11) **Holiness:** God’s is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.

- Both a **relational** quality (separation from) and a **moral** quality (the separation is from sin or evil, and the devotion is to the good of God’s own honor or glory)

- 12) **Peace (or Order)**: In 1 Corinthians 14:33 Paul says, “God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”
- 13-14) **Righteousness, Justice**: God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.
- 15) **Jealousy**: God continually seeks to protect his own honor.
- 16) **Wrath**: God intensely hates all sin (opposed to his moral character).

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” (Rom 1:18 ESV)

Attributes of Purpose

- 17) **Will**: That attribute of God whereby he approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for the existence and activity of himself and all creation.
- God’s Will in General: Scripture frequently indicates God’s will as the final or most ultimate reason for everything that happens.
 - Distinctions in Aspects of God’s Will:
 1. **Necessary will**: everything that he must will according to his own nature. What does God will necessarily? He wills himself. God eternally wills to be, or wants to be, who he is and what he is. He says, “I AM WHO I AM” or, “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE” (Ex. 3:14). God cannot choose to be different than he is or to cease to exist.
 2. **Free will**: all things that God decided to will but had no necessity to will according to his nature. Here we must put God’s decision to create the universe, and all God’s acts of redemption.
 3. **Secret will**: includes his hidden decrees by which he governs the universe and determines everything that will happen. He does not ordinarily reveal these decrees to us (except in prophecies of the future), so these decrees really are God’s “secret” will.
 4. **Revealed will**: God’s declared will concerning what we should do or what God commands us to do.
- 18) **Freedom**: God does whatever he pleases.
- 19) **Omnipotence (Power, Sovereignty)**: God is able to do all his holy will.

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,” (Eph 3:20 ESV)

“Summary” Attributes

20) **Perfection:** God completely possesses all excellent qualities and lacks no part of any qualities that would be desirable for him.

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt 5:48 ESV)

21) **Blessedness:** God delights fully in himself and in all that reflects his character.

22) **Beauty:** God is the sum of all desirable qualities.

23) **Glory:** The created brightness that surrounds God’s revelation of himself.

- The created light or brilliance that surrounds God as he manifests himself in his creation.

Questions for Review and Application

1. What is the difference between the Communicable and Incommunicable attributes of God?
2. What danger would there be in considering one attribute of God more important than another?
3. Which attribute of God amazes you the most? Why?

The Doctrine of the Trinity

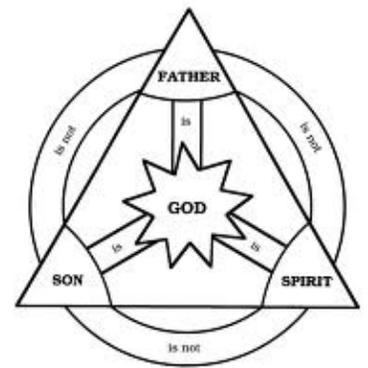
BFC Article 2: The Trinity

2-1 There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, the same in substance, eternally equal in power and glory.

The doctrine of the Trinity is progressively revealed in Scripture.

The OT partially reveals the Trinity

- “Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.” (Gen 1:26 ESV)
- “Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:22)
- Other supporting verses: Gen 11:7, Isaiah 6:8, Ps 45:6-7 (along with Heb 1:8), Mal 3:1-2, Is 48:16, “Angel of the Lord” passages where the messenger is called “God” or “The Lord” (Gen 16:13, Ex 3:2-6, 23:20-22, Num 22:35,28, Judg 2:1-2, 6:11,14)



The NT more fully reveals the Trinity

- “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him, and behold a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” (Matt 3:16-17 ESV)
- Other supporting verses: Matt 28:19, 1 Cor 12:4-6, 2 Cor 13:14, Eph 4:4-6, 1 Pet 1:2, Jude 20-21.

Definition: God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God and there is one God!

- **God is three *distinct* persons:** The Father is NOT the Son, the Son is NOT the Holy Spirit & the Holy Spirit is NOT the Father. (John 1:1, 17:24, 1 Jn 2:1, Heb 7:25, Jn 14:26)

Note: The Holy Spirit is a person not a power or force! Not only are pronouns used to describe the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-14) but He is in a coordinate relationship with the Father & Son (Matt 28:19, 1 Cor 12:4-6, 2 Cor 13:14, Eph 4:4-6, 1 Peter 1:2) and He performs activities which are unique to persons (teaches - Jn 14:26, searches - 1 Cor 2:10, prays - Rom 8:26-27, distributes gifts - 1 Cor 12:11, forbids activities - Acts 16:6-7, speaks - Acts 8:29, 13:2)

- **Each person is *fully* God:** Each member of the Trinity is fully God, not just a part of God (i.e. when you see Jesus have all of God NOT just a part of God - Jn 14:7)
 - God the Father is clearly God: Genesis 1:1
 - God the Son is clearly God: John 1:1-4, 20:25-31, Heb 1:1-3, Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1, Rom 9:5, Isaiah 9:6, Col 2:9
 - God the Holy Spirit is clearly God: Matt 28:19, Acts 5:3-4, Ps 139:7-8
- **There is only *one* God:** Deut 6:4-5 - “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” (Ex 15:11, 1 Kgs 8:60, Is 45:5-6, 1 Tim 2:5, Rom 3:30, 1 Cor 8:6, Jam 2:19)
- **Each member of the Trinity is eternally God:** In other words, the Father has always been God the Father, the Son has always been God the Son, etc.

All analogies have shortcomings: The three-leaf clover, a tree with roots trunk & branches, water in 3 forms, an egg with 3 parts all fall short because each part is not fully the item in question. (i.e. the trunk is not the tree, the shell of an egg is not an egg, etc.)

Ancient Heresies to avoid:

- Modalism (Sabellianism): claims that there is only God who appears to us in three different modes (i.e. God was the Father in the OT, Jesus in the NT and after Pentecost He is the Holy Spirit.)
 - Denies that God is three distinct persons.
 - United Pentecostal denomination (TD Jakes, Creflo Dollar, Tommy Tennerly - "The God Chasers")
 - Popular musicians - "Philips Craig & Dean"
- Arianism: Named after Arius, a Bishop of Alexandria whose views were condemned at the Council of Nicea in AD 325. This view claims that God the Son was at one point created (using the phrase '*first-born*' to mean created rather than pre-eminent) by God the Father and that before that time the Son did not exist, nor did the Holy Spirit but the Father only.
 - Modern day Arians: Jehovah Witnesses.
- Other heresies: Subordinationism, adoptionism, Tritheism (which denies there is only one God).

Relationship of the members of the Trinity

- Each person of the Trinity has a different primary *eternal* function in relating to the world.
- "Ontological equality but economic subordination."
 - Ontological - equal in essence
 - Economic subordination - differing in their roles as they submit to God the Father

1) In Creation:

- The Father spoke creative words to bring the universe into being. (Genesis 1:1)
- The Son carried out those creative decrees. (Jn 1:3, Col 1:16, Ps 33:6, 9, 1 Cor 8:6, Heb 1:2)
- The Holy Spirit actively sustained and manifested God's immediate presence in His creation. (Gen 1:2, Ps 33:6, 139:7)

2) In Redemption:

- God the Father planned redemption and sent His Son into the world. (Jn 3:16, Gal 4:4, Eph 1:9-10)
- God the Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us. (Jn 4:34, 5:24, 5:30, 6:38, Heb 10:5-7)
- God the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to apply redemption to us. (Jn 14:26, 16:7, 15:26)