

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

by

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Attribute

Definition of an Attribute

- An attribute is a characteristic of God's nature by which He performs activities. Each of God's actions conforms perfectly to each of His attributes.

Discussion of an Attribute

- God's attributes are not personal, but natural, and are shared by all three persons equally without distinction. They are basic to what God is.
- God's attributes do not overlap. One attribute is not the basis of, nor based in, another attribute. For instance, holiness is not based on righteousness or goodness.
- Attributes inhere (cannot be separated from) the essence, and therefore are shared equally by the three persons.

Essence

Definition of Essence

- General Definition: The essence of a thing or person is the substance or substances of which the thing consists. The essence of a thing or person may consist of either one or many components. Each component may have one or many characteristics.
- *Theological Definition:* By the essence of God we mean that one, self-existent, immense, simple spirit of which God consists.

Discussion of the Essence

- God's essence consists of "spirit stuff."
- The various biblical descriptions of God's essence are not attributes, but "characteristics of the essence." God's essence, unlike man's, consists of one component, "spirit stuff," which has several characteristics. Since God's essence exists and is alive, God is a being.

Nature

Definition of Nature

- General Definition: The nature of a thing or being is the sum total of all that the thing or being is and does. Essence + Attributes = Nature
- Theological Definition: By the nature of God we mean the sum total of all that is true concerning His Essence and His Attributes.

Discussion of Nature

- If something is true of God's nature, it is true of both His essence and His attributes. Positionally, believers today have become sharers in the divine nature, and so ought to live apart from "the corruption that is in the world by means of strong desire." 2 Peter 1:4ff

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

Being

Definition of Being

- Being is a state of existing in an animated state. Being goes beyond the mere fact of existence. An inanimate object is not a being, nor is a plant a being, because a plant does not possess animate life. Animals are beings, as are humans (human beings). God is a unique being, unlike any other being.

Discussion of Being

- When we say that God is a *being* we mean that He is *living* and *has the ability to think and act*. (1 Thessalonians 1:9) God is a unique being, in that His animated life is expressed in a divine nature, and is consistent with all that is true of that divine nature. (See discussion of the characteristics of nature in this presentation.)

Person

Definition of Person

- A person is a nature individualized and endowed with consciousness, reason and determinative volition, and is, therefore, held responsible for that person's actions.
- One distinction between the essence of man and the essence of God is in the area of person. In God, essence is singular (one spirit), attributes are pure (without distortion), and God's nature is perfect. But He is complex (plural) of person.
- In man, essence is complex (body, soul, spirit), attributes are distorted by sin, and his nature is, therefore unholy and unrighteous. However, he is simple (singular) of person.
- God is *one* in essence but *three* in person. In other words, God is one *in an altogether different way* than He is three. Man is a multiplicity of essences (one per individual person), all similar by nature.

Discussion of Person

- When we use "person" of God we mean the three distinct individuals who equally belong to the one essence, share equally in the nature (including *desirous* will), and each of whom has His own *determinative* will.
- The various non-trinitarian errors consistently confuse essence with person, and therefore do not understand the economic relationships within the trinity. TRUE TRINITARIANS ARE NOT TRITHEISTS, NO MATTER WHAT THE SABELLIANS AND MONARCHISTS CLAIM.

Trinity

Theological Definition of Trinity

- By the term trinity we mean that God is one eternal, self-existent, immense, and simple spirit Who is individualized by three distinct and identifiable persons designated to the present creation Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Discussion of the Trinity

- In simplest terms, the Scriptures teach the trinitarian nature of God by distinguishing between the three determinative wills of three divine individuals who share equally in the one essence. Each person has a determinative will, though they all share the same desirous will.
- There can be no subordination as to essential being of one person of the Godhead to another. The subordination of persons in the Godhead *is only in respect to time and creation*. It is not eternal. There is no subordination concerning the relationship to the divine essence, but only in the matter of personal subsistence and personal manifestation, and only in reference to the time program of creation.

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

- Certain personal operations are not performed by the three persons jointly, but by individual persons exclusively. The oneness of God's essence explains the fact that, while the three persons are distinct, there is an inter-communion of person and an immanence of one divine person with another that permits the peculiar work of one to be ascribed, with limitation, to either of the others, and the manifestation of one to be the manifestation of the other (John 14).

Doctrinal Errors Concerning the Trinity

The Error of Tritheism

- Tritheism is the polytheistic idea that God is really three Gods. Christians are accused of this view by Jews, Mohammedans, and various forms of false Christian sects of Unitarians and Sabellians.

The Error or Monarchism or Sabellianism

- In general, this is the idea that God is only one person. The Biblical truth of the trinity is explained away in one of two major ways:

Dynamic Monarchism (also called Modalistic Sabellianism)

- This is the view that the Father is the only person, the Son is a mere human being who was indwelt by the Father at baptism, who deserted Him on the cross, and that the Holy Spirit is a personification of the power of the Father. This error is also called "adoptionism." Many who consider themselves trinitarians slip into this error when they attribute the work of Christ to the Father, or pray to the Lord Jesus or the Holy Spirit rather than to the Father.

Patripassion Monarchism

- The view here is that the One God variously represents Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since Christ and the Father are one person, when Christ suffered on the cross the Father suffered as well.

The Error of Arianism

- This error states that Christ and the Holy Spirit are not God at all. They are called God in Scripture because they were the first created persons. The most visual of the modern representatives of this view are the Jehovah's Witnesses. Arians cannot be called Christians in any biblical sense because they have redefined God to exclude the deity of Christ.

Definitions Regarding the Trinity

Characteristics of the Essence

Spirit (that "stuff" of which God consists)

Definition of Spirit

- A spirit is a real, incorporeal, immaterial being.

Discussion of Spirit

- When we say that God is "spirit" we mean that God's essence is real, incorporeal, immaterial substance in which God's attributes inhere and the Persons subsist. In other words, God's essence consists of "spirit stuff." In John 4:24, The word "spirit" is "anarthrous," indicating quality. God is as to His essential quality, spirit.
- Taken together, Luke 24:36-40 and Ephesians 6:12, indicate that a spirit does not have flesh, bones, nor blood.

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

Oneness

Definition of Oneness

- God is one because the three persons share equally in only one essence. Oneness speaks to the “aloneness” of God.

Discussion of Oneness

- How Many Essences are There? John 10:30 indicates that only ONE spirit makes up the triune God. Christ and the Father are one thing, not one person. Note the NEUTER GENDER of the number ONE.
- Is there only one Yahweh, or is Yahweh only one thing? The correct translation of Deuteronomy 6:4 is “Hear Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh.”
- The word “one” (Hebrews = *echad*) indicates not “aloneness of being,” but “unity of essence.” The Hebrew word “*levado*” meaning “one” in the sense of only or alone, is not used here. This verse indicates not that there is only one God (which is true), but that Yahweh is one thing, or one unified essence. Correctly understood, Deuteronomy 6:4 teaches the simplicity of the essence (see simplicity below) rather than the traditional view that it teaches monotheism, or aloneness (oneness) of being. While both monotheism (aloneness of being) and simplicity of the essence are taught in Scripture, simplicity is often overlooked in Bible teaching.
- Unity of essence is related to oneness of essence in that unity expresses the fact that the essence is made up of only one thing (see simplicity below) while oneness indicates that there is only one essence, and therefore only one genuine God.

Self-existence

Definition of Self-existence

- By self existence we mean that the essence (spirit stuff) of which God consists exists without cause. God is the “uncaused cause” of all things. No act of will caused God to exist.

Discussion of Self Existence

- Exodus 3:14 - God is what He is.
- John 5:26 - God is “continually having” life. Note the present tense verb. God has life “in the sphere of Himself” This “essential life” is expressed in the decree in the Father and is produced through the Son in the transference of eternal life to the believer (John 5:24) and in the resurrection of the dead (John 5:21-29).

Immensity

Definition of Immensity - 1 Kings 8:27

- By immensity we mean that God’s essence is not containable. Immensity is not to be confused with omnipresence, which will be discussed below.

Discussion of Immensity - Isaiah 66:1-2

- God is *not* bigger than His creation. It is more accurate to say that the Creator is apart from, or distinguished from, His creation, and therefore not contained within it. God’s essence is incomparable in size to His creation because only created things have size.

Distinctions concerning God’s Immensity - Psalm 139:7-10

- “Omnipresence” is not an attribute or characteristic of the essence. “Omnipresence” relates God’s essence to His creation. God, as regards His creation, is present everywhere. Since the creation is not eternal, God’s omnipresence is not eternal. Therefore, omnipresence is not an attribute, or characteristic of the essence which must be eternal.

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

Simplicity

Definition of Simplicity

- God's essence will never change. God's essence is spirit only, and will never be anything else: John 4:24
By simplicity we mean that God's essence is singular in substance. It is spirit alone, unmixed with any other element.

Distinctions concerning Simplicity

- Several persons equally share in one essence: John 10:30. The one essence consists of only one substance: James 2:19. Simplicity is related to oneness in that oneness tells us that there is only one essence, and simplicity says that one essence consists of only one substance (unity).

The Attributes of God

Goodness

- Goodness is not to be confused with righteousness: Romans 5:7. See also the discussion of holiness. The term "good" is not an ethical term, as is "righteousness": Matthew 7:11; 17.
- Goodness provides that which is needed to produce happiness: Luke 1:53; Acts 14:17. God is happy, not angry, concerning that which He has produced: 1 Timothy 1:11, 16.
- In the ultimate sense, only God is characteristically good, although evil men can do good things: Mk. 10:18. God is good in that He maintains His own happiness. God is good in that He maintains the happiness of others.

Love

Definition of Love

- Love is that volitional act of God whereby He sacrificially delights in and provides for the well-being of the objects of His love.

Discussion of Love

- Love is an act of volition, not emotion: Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; Colossians 3:19.
- Love always has an object: 1 John 3:10-14; John 3:16.
- Love delights in the well-being of its object: 1 Corinthians 13:4.
- Love produces self-sacrifice: John 14:15; John 3:16; Ephesians 5:25; Galatians 2:20; Romans 5:8.
- Love is a characteristic of God through which He acts, and is therefore an attribute: 1 John 4:8, 16.
- God is love in that He characteristically maintains a delight in the well-being of the objects of His love, even to the point of self-sacrifice.
- God's acts of love are not to be confused with His attribute of love: John 3:16; Ephesians 5:25; Hebrews 12:6; 2 Corinthians 13:11-14.
- Longsuffering, grace, and kindness are not separate attributes, but are aspects of love. 1) Longsuffering: 1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Peter 3:9 2) Grace: 2 Thessalonians 2:16 (In the Greek N.T.). 3) Kindness: 1 Corinthians 13:4.

Truth

Definition of Truth

- Truth is the representation of all things as they actually are. God is true in that He sees Himself and all things as they actually are.

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

Discussion of Truth

- The Lord Jesus Christ is Truth personified: John 14:6.
- God the Father is “Characteristically True”: John 17:3.
- Believers are related to truth because we are “in the true One, and in His Son Jesus Christ”: 1 John 5:20.

Righteousness

Definition of Righteousness

- Righteousness is the ability to consistently act and think in accordance with that which is correct, including both ethical and non-ethical situations and activities. God always acts and thinks correctly with regard to Himself and with regard to His creatures.

Discussion of Righteousness

- Righteousness is an eternal attribute of God: Psalm 111:3.
- God never acts in an unrighteous manner: Psalm 71:19.
- Man’s righteousness should be determined by comparison to God’s righteousness, not by comparison to another man’s: Isaiah 45:24-25.

Holiness

Definition of Holiness

- Holiness is the quality of God by which He maintains Himself distinct and separate from anything that is unlike Himself. Holiness includes both moral and non-moral separation.

Discussion of Holiness

- God is holy in that He maintains His separation from anything unlike Himself, and conforms perfectly to the purity that He demands of others. Leviticus 11:44, 45 indicates that an individual is holy when he conforms to God’s program in distinction to any other program one might be tempted to use in life. It is clear from Leviticus 19:2ff that both moral and ceremonial laws involved in Old Testament legal holiness.
- Holiness is based on God’s demands for a correct lifestyle as related to a dispensational household. Israel’s holiness included separation from Gentiles in food and clothing. Today, separation is based exclusively on living the grace lifestyle. See 1 Peter 1:14.
- In man holiness as two aspects: 1) Holiness involves a separation from that which is unlike God: 1 Peter 1:14; 2) Holiness involves a conformity to that which is like God: 1 Peter 1:15.

Almightyness (Not Omnipotence)

Definition of Almighty

- God is almighty in that there is nothing He cannot do to produce the result of His determination.

Definition of Omnipotence

- The word *omnipotence* means all powerful rather than almighty. Think of it as the ability to do whatever God deems necessary by applying the correct amount of might. While God is almighty, He does not apply all of His almightyness at one time in all situations. Rather He applies power in just the right amount to gain the perfect result. Power is distinguished from authority in that authority is the right to do a thing, while power is the ability to do a thing by applying a perfect amount of God’s almightyness. In other words, God’s omnipotence comes out of His almightyness.

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

The Biblical Statement of God's Almightyness

- The Revelation uses the Greek Word *PANKRATOR* of God 8 times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:15; 21:22). See also 2 Corinthians 6:18. In addition, the Hebrew text uses the word almighty (*shaddai*) of God 48 times. God is all almighty in that He is able to do whatever He determines to do, limited only by that which is contradictory to His nature.

Omniscience

Definition of Omniscience

- God is omniscient in that He knows all things instantaneously and simultaneously, without reference to succession, interval or sequence.

Discussion of Omniscience

- Omniscience is not to be confused with foreknowledge. Omniscience is based on “oida” knowledge - 2 Corinthians 12:3. This kind of knowledge God has because of His nature. God foreknows because He has experienced the fact before man knows about it - Romans 8:29. Since foreknowledge is based on God’s experience it changes, whereas omniscience is unchangeable as an attribute of God.
- God’s knowledge is not limited by temporal actualities - Romans 4:17b. God knows all potentialities as well as all actualities - Matthew 11:21-23. God sees all from an eternal viewpoint, knowing the beginning and the ending simultaneously - Isaiah 46:10

The Characteristics of God's Nature

Sovereign

Definition of Sovereignty

- One is sovereign when he is able to express his will without subordination to another person, thing, or force in any area of wish or determination.
- God is sovereign in that He is able to express His volition with reference to the expression of His attributes or essence without subordination to any other.

Discussion of Sovereignty

- God has two areas of will: 1) Desirous will - 1 Timothy 2:4; 2) Determinative will: Ephesians 1:11
- God expresses His determinative will in various ways, for instance (but not limited to): 1) Salvation: James 1:18; 2) Spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:11

Free

Definition of Freedom

- God is free in that He has liberty to express His essence and attributes apart from any inner compulsion or necessity, or from any outward constraint.

Discussion of Freedom

- God is free in two areas: 1) God is free mentally: Isaiah 40:13; Romans 11:34; 2) God is free causally (nothing outside of Himself causes Him to act: Romans 11:35.)

Infinite

Definition of Infinity

- God is infinite in that He has no limitations or bounds in any area of His essence or attributes. That is to say, God’s nature cannot be constrained or forced in any way.

The Doctrine of God

Some Basic Definitions

Discussion of Infinity

- God's infinite nature is expressed in Psalm 139, note especially vs. 6, 12, 17-18.

Eternal

Definition of Eternality

- God is eternal in that He inhabits eternity in such a way as to exist in one whole, indivisible, continual present, so that His is duration without succession, beginning, or end. This is not to say that God is static, and cannot experience duration or succession.

Discussion of Eternality

- God does not "live forever," rather He "inhabits eternity" – Isaiah 57:15.
- Christ's statement "I am" was by way of a demonstration of His eternal deity – John 18:5, 6.

Immutable

Definition of Immutability

- God is immutable in that neither His essence nor His attributes change either consciously or unconsciously.

Discussion of Immutability

- Once it is determined, God's plan does not change, nor can He lie – Hebrews 6:13-18.
- In His programs, God has calculated changes of His actions and attitudes. Therefore, God is not a static being who has not included changes in His overall program – Malachi 3:6-7.
- Every kind of good gift and perfect giving is coming from God, concerning Whom there is no "place" change, nor "shadow caused by turning" – James 1:17.

Mobile

Definition of Mobility

- God is mobile in that He is able to change His attitudes and activities or to choose the individual or compound use of His attributes.

Discussion of Mobility

- God changes His attitudes - Genesis 6:6. God changes His attitudes in a different way than does man - 1 Samuel 15:11, 28, 29. God is not always pleased with men and their actions - 2 Corinthians 5:9. God does not express all of His attributes all of the time equally to all people - John 3:16; Romans 9:13.
- God's changes in attitude are built into His program and applied sovereignly and freely within that program.