

On the Knowledge of God

“Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear. The long career of Israel demonstrates this clearly enough, and the history of the Church confirms it. So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God . . .”

On the Knowledge of God

“Before the Christian Church goes into eclipse anywhere there must first be a corrupting of her simple basic theology. She simply gets a wrong answer to the question, “What is God like?” and goes on from there. Though she may continue to cling to a sound nominal creed, her practical working creed has become false. The masses of her adherents come to believe that God is different from what He actually is; and that is heresy of the most insidious and deadly kind.”

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Doctrine of God

The Character of God:
Incommunicable & Communicable Attributes

Incommunicable Attributes

- 1. Independence (Aseity):** 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 (Acts 17:24-25, Job 41:11).
- 2. Unchangeableness (Immutability):** 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 (Mal 3:6, Jas 1:17).

Incommunicable Attributes

- 3. 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 (Rev 1:8, Ps 90:2-4, 2 Pet 3:8, Is 46:9-10).
- 4. 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 (Jer 23:24, Ps 139:7-10, 1 Kgs 8:27, Is 66:1-2).

Incommunicable Attributes

- 5. Unity:** God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times.

Communicable Attributes

- 1. Spirituality:** 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 (Jn 4:24; Ex 20:4-7).
- 2. 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 (1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; 1 Jn 4:2).

Communicable Attributes

- 3. Knowledge (Omniscience):** God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act (1 Jn 3:20; Job 37:16).
- 4. Wisdom:** God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals (Rom 11:33; 16:27).
- 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 (Titus 1:2; Prov 30:5).

Communicable Attributes

- 6. Goodness:** God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval (Lk 18:19; Ps 34:8).
- 7. Love:** God eternally gives of himself to others (1 Jn 4:8, 10; Rom 5:8).
- 8. Holiness:** God is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor (Isa 6:3; Lev 19:2; Heb 12:14).

Communicable Attributes

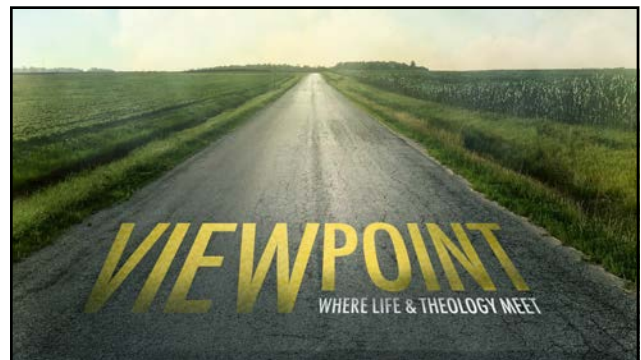
- 9. Righteousness, Justice:** God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right (Gen 18:25; Rom 3:21-26).
- 10. Jealousy:** God continually seeks to protect his own honor (Ex 20:5; 34:14).
- 11. Wrath:** God intensely hates all sin (Ex 32:9-10; Eph 2:3).

Communicable Attributes

- 12. 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 (Eph 1:11; Rev 4:11).
- a) **General will:** The final reason for everything that happens.
 - b) **Secret will:** God's hidden decrees by which he governs the universe and determines everything that will happen (Deut 29:29).
 - c) **Revealed will:** The moral law of God for Christ's followers.

Communicable Attributes

- 13. Omnipotence (Power, Sovereignty):** God is able to do all his holy will (Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17).
- 14. Perfection:** God completely possesses all excellent qualities and lacks no part of any qualities that would be desirable for him (Ps 18:30; Matt 5:48).
- 15. Blessedness:** God delights fully in himself and in all that reflects his character (Gen 1:31; Isa 62:5).
- 16. Beauty:** That attribute of God whereby he is the sum of all desirable qualities (Ps 27:4; 73:25).



The Trinity

On the Trinity

"Thus let us enter together on the path of charity in search of [God] of whom it is said: 'Seek his face evermore.' This is the sacred and safe compact into which I, in the presence of the Lord our God, shall enter with those who read what I am writing . . . where we are investigating the unity of the Trinity, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For nowhere else is the error more dangerous, the search more laborious, and the results more rewarding."

Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 1.3.5

Definition

“God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”

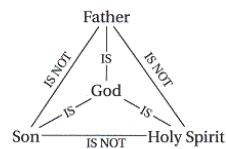
Wayne Grudem

Three Helpful Terms

1. Distinction
2. Equality
3. Unity

God eternally exists as **three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (DISTINCTION)**,
and **each person is fully God (EQUALITY)**,
and **there is one God (UNITY)**.

Trinitarian Triangle



Overview of Trinitarian Theology

1. Ebionism: Originated from a Jewish-Christian sect. States that Jesus was a human only, and as a revolutionary zealot was martyred for attempting to effect change in corrupt first-century Judaism. DENIES THE DEITY OF JESUS.
2. Docetism – An idea embraced by Gnostics. Gnosticism holds that the material world is bad and the spiritual realm is good; therefore, docetists held that Jesus only appeared (*dokein*, to seem, imagine) to be human, but was in fact a spirit. DENIES THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.

Overview of Trinitarian Theology

3. Adoptionism – A Monarchian view, asserts that Jesus was adopted by the Father at his baptism because of his piety he was considered worthy to become the Son of God. REJECTS EQUALITY.
4. Modalism – A Monarchian view, claims that God is one, yet manifests himself in three different modes, that the Father acted as the Son, then the Spirit. REJECTS DISTINCTION.

Overview of Trinitarian Theology

5. Sabellianism – An offshoot of modalism, holds that God the Father became the Son in the New Testament, then became the Spirit in the church. REJECTS DISTINCTION.
6. Arianism – Arius, an early presbyter of Alexandria, believed that the Son was created by the Father and did not share the same divine substance as the Father. REJECTS EQUALITY.

Response to Arianism

The Council of Nicea – A council of Christian bishops that met in AD 325 to address Arianism. Christian tradition was upheld and Christ was described being in “one essence” (ὁμοουσιότης) with the Father.

Nicean Creed

We believe in one God, the Father all governing, creator of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father; God from God, light from light, True God from True God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father, through whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human. He suffered and the third day he rose, and ascended into the heavens. And he will come to judge both the living and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Spirit.

Overview of Trinitarian Theology

6. Apollinarianism – Apollinarius, a fourth-century bishop of Laodicea, declared that in his incarnation Christ took on a human body and soul but not a human mind or spirit. DENIES THE UNITY OF JESUS' TWO NATURES.
7. Nestorianism – Although Jesus was one person, his two natures existed side by side and hence were separable. Held that Jesus the human died on the cross, but not Jesus the divine. DENIES THE UNITY OF JESUS' TWO NATURES.

Overview of Trinitarian Theology

8. Eutychianism – Eutyches interpreted the church's confession that Jesus was “one person” with the idea that our Lord possessed only “one nature.” As a result, Eutyches conceived Jesus as one in whom divinity and humanity mingled to form a new body. DENIES THE DISTINCTION OF JESUS' TWO NATURES.

Response to Christological Heresies

The Council of Chalcedon – A council of Christian bishops that met in AD 451. They emphasized the oneness of Christ's person and the distinction of His full two natures, divine and human, in unity with each other.

On Similes & Metaphors

1. Recognize the constraints of language.
2. Can be helpful but are inherently dangerous.
3. Always start with what is clear, then move from there.

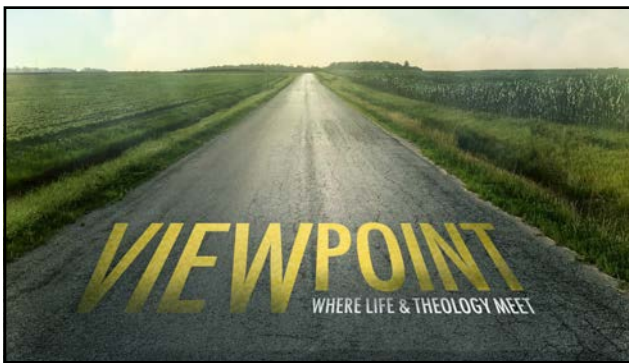
Review

1. Distinction
2. Equality
3. Unity

God eternally exists as **three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (DISTINCTION)**, and **each person is fully God (EQUALITY)**, and **there is one God (UNITY)**.

Definition

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



Providence

Four Majority Views*

1. Hard Determinism (Hyper-Calvinism)
2. Compatibilism (Calvinism)
3. Libertarianism (Arminianism)
4. Molinism

*Taken from Randy Alcorn's book, *Hand in Hand*

Hard Determinism

Sovereignty: God makes everything happen, good or evil, exactly as he has decided, to bring about his perfect plan, with all his creatures always doing exactly what he determines.

Evil: No matter how evil or how much suffering is involved, God is the ultimate (though not usually the immediate) cause of all evil and suffering, every detail of which is his will.

Human Freedom: Human choices, good and evil, are predetermined by God through the person's internal makeup and external circumstances. Every choice is what God wills and decrees. People are not free to choose in any meaningful sense.

Compatibilism

Sovereignty: God works out his will and accomplishes his plan, doing good and permitting evil for which he has ultimate purposes; he grants people the ability to exercise meaningful choices, for which they are fully responsible.

Evil: God accomplishes his decreed will while permitting violations of his moral will. God is not the source of evil, but can and does use evil to accomplish his ultimate plan.

Human Freedom: People make choices according to their nature and desires. They are fully responsible and accountable for their choices. Their choices are part of God's decretive will, but are meaningful.

Libertarianism

Sovereignty: All God chooses to do happens. Everything angels and humans choose, he permits, including much he doesn't desire. He may or may not use for good all evils his children experience.

Evil: Evil is a result of humans and demons choosing to rebel against God, but in the end God's plan will be victorious.

Human Freedom: While some choices are determined and all are limited, choices are free only when the person chooses an action they could have chosen not to do. There is real contrary choice. Some choices God wills; others are against God's will.

Molinism

Sovereignty: Knowing what humans will freely choose, and also what they would have chosen under different circumstances, God has created the world that would most glorify himself.

Evil: Evil is caused by humans and demons working against God's will, but through setting in place certain circumstances, God is ultimately victorious.

Human Freedom: People choose freely, but God has arranged the world knowing what they will choose. For Libertarians, God foreknows the future without ordaining it. For Compatibilists, God ordains the future by the way he arranges it.

The Philosophical Mistake

When two passages seem to be paradoxical the tendency is to attempt to alleviate the tension by drawing a philosophical (not an exegetical) conclusion that emphasizes one point over the other. DO NOT DO THIS! Learn to live in the tension.

Q&A

A Prayer By A. W. Tozer

They that know You not may call upon You as other than You are, and so worship not You but a creature of their own fancy; therefore enlighten our minds that we may know You as You are, so that we may perfectly love You and worthily praise You . . .

Were we to hold our peace the stones would cry out; yet if we speak what shall we say? Teach us to know that we cannot know, for the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Let faith support us where reason fails, and we shall think because we believe, not in order that we may believe.

