

Theology Our Saviour Evangelical Free Church

The Doctrine of God

Key Concepts:

- God's Incommunicable Attributes
- The Communicable Attributes
- God as Trinity

Pages covered in *Bible Doctrine* by Wayne Grudem: 67-123

Review from Session 1

What is theology? What is doctrine?

In a narrow sense theology is **The Doctrine of God**. In a broad sense, any belief about God and His relationship to the world. Doctrine is **teaching and instruction**.

What are the three forms the Word of God comes to us in?

As a person, **Jesus Christ (John 1)**

As speech by God (e.g. decrees – “let there be light”, personal address – “you shall have no other gods before me”, through humans - prophets

Written, **The Bible (Ex. 31:18, 32:16; Deut. 31:9-13; Isa. 30:8; 2 Tim. 3:16)**

The Doctrine of God

The Existence and Knowability of God

How do we know God exists?

1. An **inner sense** for all (Rom. 1:21-22)
2. An inner sense for the **Christian** (John 14:23, Rom. 8:15-16, Eph. 3:17, 1 Pet. 1:8)
3. **Nature** (Acts 14:17, Rom. 1:20)
4. Scripture (Gen. 1:1) **The Bible assumes God's existence, it is not burdened with the need to prove. The burden of proof, according to Scripture is those who would deny God's existence. This should still be true today, given even mathematical and physical properties, however, the Church often feels like we must fight for a belief in God's existence.**
5. The Holy Spirit/God Himself (1 Cor. 1:21, 2:5, 2 Cor. 4:4)

Proofs for the Existence of God

The Cosmological Argument: Everything in the universe has a cause, then the universe itself must have a cause, the only thing that could cause something so great is God.

The Teleological Argument: Similar to the Cosmological Argument, but focuses on the order of the universe. Something so vast and so ordered could have only been put here by God. This argument is somewhat weaker and really only gives victory to an “intelligent design” argument.

The Ontological Argument: This argument supposes the idea of a God who is greater than anything that can be imagined. If there was such a possibility, God would have to exist, because it is greater to exist than not to exist.

The Moral Argument: All rational people have similar senses of right and wrong, therefore there must be a God who is the source of this knowledge and we will one day meet Him as He gives justice to all people.

If God exists can we know Him?

Read Daniel 2:20-23

God, in His grace and mercy has allowed us to know Him. For those who are Christians, we are given a further blessing to not only know things about God, but to actually know Him, to have fellowship with Him, and to spend eternity with Him.

We know God (Jer. 9:23-24) because of His sovereign free decision to reveal Himself to us.

We will never fully know God (Ps. 145:3, Rom. 11:33). He is incomprehensible.

God's Incommunicable Attributes

Incommunicable attributes: those attributes that God does not share or “communicate” to others (Grudem, p. 71).

Independence (Acts 17:24-25)

Definition: 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.

Why does it matter?

Unchangeableness (Isa. 46:9-11)

Definition: 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.

Why does it matter?

Excurses: Does God change His mind?

Ex. 32:9-14, Isa. 38:1-6, Gen. 6:6, 1 Sam. 15:10, Jonah 3:4, 10. God responds differently to different situations. If these situations remained unchanged, God would have done as He said. However, they changed, therefore God's response to them changed. God prefers mercy over judgment. He always prefers to extend grace.

Eternity (Job 36:26)

Definition: 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.

Why does it matter?

Omnipresence and Omnipotence (Jeremiah 23:24)

Definition: 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. His omnipotence means that He has the power to do everything He wills.

Why does it matter?

Because of His omnipresence God is able to give His entire attention to millions and billions of people at the same time. When we struggle or succeed, we can be sure God is there. In His omnipotence, we can be sure that He will do exactly what He says He will do, because He is both able and willing.

Transcendence and Imminence (1 Kings 8:27; Isaiah 40:12-26)

Definition: God is not limited by space or time. He is the same, everywhere, all the time, throughout all history, and throughout eternity.

Why does it matter?

Because God is imminent and transcendent He is able to hold all of creation together. Secondly, we can be sure He will not change, because nothing can change Him. For these reasons, we must worship Him in “spirit and truth.” There are not rituals, body movements, or chants that please God. The only way to please an imminent and transcendent being is to be wholly devoted to Him in your heart.

Omniscience (Psalm 139:13-16; Hebrews 4:13)

Definition: God knows everything including our innermost thoughts, past, present, and future.

Why does it matter?

God has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6), His omniscience assures us He will not. He cannot and will not forget us. However, for those who are not Christians, this is bad news. God cannot possibly overlook their transgressions for He know them all as well. This doctrine should astound us because we cannot comprehend it. God is not a computer that dispenses information, He knows everything that has, is, and will happen.

The Communicable Attributes of God

Attributes of God’s Being

What is God made of? God is Spirit.

So, God does not need a physical body and He has no dimensions. He is not limited by space.

How can we imitate this?

God has given us a spirit and we are told to worship Him in Spirit and truth. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit gives life to our dead spirits and they become alive, our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit.

Can you see God?

Yes and no. Jesus was a man to be seen and we can still see God today as He shows Himself to us through visible, created things. However, we cannot see God fully.

How can we imitate this?

When we think of God, we can picture one of the hundreds of visible analogies present in the Scripture. While none of these will ever fully capture God, each is true about Him. Therefore, we can begin to think and see him this way.

Attributes of God's Mind: Wisdom & Truthfulness

God is both wise and true; therefore He knows the best goals and will faithfully lead us to them without fail.

How can we imitate this?

Like all the attributes of God, we will not be able to perfectly imitate any of them. However, we can strive to pursue and discern Godly wisdom through reading the Scripture and praying and we can seek to be trustworthy and truthful in every area of our lives.

God's Moral Attributes

Goodness

All God does is good.

How can we imitate this?

We should strive to do good. That is to say, we should try to do what God approves of. Read Psalm 73:25-26.

Love

God eternally gives of Himself to others.

How can we imitate this?

First, we love God in return, then second, we love others as God loves them. Keep in mind, this does not always mean acceptance of everything as some in our society think that it does/should.

Jealousy

God continually seeks to protect His own honor.

Why can God be like this? How can we imitate this?

First, we must recognize what pride and jealousy really are. It is not wrong for God to be proud about His own glory, because He is glorious. Therefore, His highest aim should be to honor Himself. As for us imitating this, we should recognize where our pride lies and give glory to God. In other words, we should not try to be jealous toward ourselves like God is jealous toward Himself, but we should try to be jealous toward God like God is toward Himself.

Wrath

Read Romans 1:18

God intensely hates all sin.

How can we imitate this?

We too can feel a holy hatred toward sin and injustice and trust God to right those things. God's wrath, like of His attributes, is a good thing.

God's Attributes of Purpose

God's Will

God approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for existence and activity of Himself and all creation.

3 Different Types of God's Will

1. Decree (Eph. 1:11)
2. Desire (1 John 2:15-17)
3. Direction (1 Thess. 4:3, 5:18)

Excurses: What does it mean to know the will of God?

The three general categories for thinking about God's will can be seen above, however, we should recognize that knowing and doing God's will is thought of very differently today than it was only a few decades ago. For most of history, people have sought to live well and honor God as His will. Now, we envelop many different decisions and life circumstances into the "will of God." These may include choosing a spouse, taking a job, buying a house, choosing a college, moving our families, and many other things. Ultimately, God wants us to know and love Him more and grow in likeness to His Son Jesus, so, whatever will help us to do that the most is the will of God.

The Trinity

Read Ps. 110:1; Is. 11:1-2; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14

The doctrine of the Trinity is progressively revealed in Scripture.

A formula for the Triune God:

- God is one
- God is three persons
- Each person is fully God

False concepts associated with Trinitarian doctrine:

Modalism

Modalists claim that God is really only one person who plays three roles or acts in three different ways. This cannot be true because we see Jesus doing the will of the Father and promising the Holy Spirit once He has gone.

Arianism

In the first century, at the Council of Nicea a bishop named Arius argued that God the Son was at a point in the past created by God the Father. The implications of this are to say that God the Son is not equal with God the Father in all of his attributes. Arius taught that he was “like the father.” Therefore Arius believed the son was not “of the same nature” as the father.

Tritheism

This is the claim that there are really three gods. This cannot be true because God promises that He is the one, true God (Deut. 6:4).

How does the Trinity operate?

The economy of the Trinity describes a functional subordination between members of the Trinity in certain situations.

The persons of the Trinity have different primary functions in relating to the world.

For example, creation. It was God the Father who spoke the universe into existence with His words, but God the Son who actually carried out these decrees. The Spirit is active in hovering over the creation, apparently infusing it immediately with the full presence of God. The same can be said of salvation. It was God the Father who planned redemption and sent His Son into the world. But, it was the Son who accomplished salvation, that was neither the work of the Father or the Spirit. Now, it is the Spirit who applies salvation, indwelling the believer and sealing him/her for salvation.

God has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Why is this of particular importance in knowing God's character?

If God had not always existed as a Trinity, He would not always have been complete and whole and He would be a changing God. But, no, He is complete and whole. Additionally, we may know that God has always been a God of love, because, having existed as F, S, and HS for eternity He has eternally existed in perfect love among Himself. The F constantly glorifying the S and the S constantly enjoying the HS and so on and so forth in the all the different directions.

All analogies fall short, but is there a picture that is helpful in describing and knowing God as the Trinity?

See Grudem page 255.

Application: How does this change me?

Which incommunicable attribute is most intriguing to you? Which one do you find most comforting? Which one swells up in you the greatest amount of hope and faith? Take a few moments and meditate on who God is.

Which one of God's communicable attributes do you believe He is calling you to imitate more faithfully? Recognizing that you will never display this as He does, how and when can you begin to implement this change in your life?

Before looking at God's will as an attribute He shares with you, how had you thought about doing God's will? Has your perception of God's will changed? How has it changed and how will you approach life differently because of that change?

Is a belief in the Trinity an essential doctrine of Christianity? Why or why not? What if you were to talk to someone who claimed to be a Christian, but they did not believe in the Trinity? What would you say to them?

Reading for next session: Grudem pages 124-135, 142-148

