

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Light Unit 1
Introduction to Theology
Week 1 – Theology Proper

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

Overview

- [Introduction](#)
- [Why do we need to have an accurate view of God?](#)
- [Contrasting views of God](#)
- [The self-revelation of God](#)
- [Special Revelation: The unity and diversity of God](#)
 - [What is meant by the trinity?](#)
 - [Scripture's emphasis on the UNITY of God](#)
 - [Scripture's emphasis on the DIVERSITY of God](#)
 - [Analogies](#)
 - [Summary: Why is the trinity important?](#)
- [The attributes of God](#)
- [Memory Verses](#)
- [Assignment](#)

Introduction

While "theology" refers to the more general study of the biblical world-view, "theology proper" refers to the specific study of God's person and character.

Definition: Theology proper is *the specific study of God's person and character.*

Why do we need to have an accurate view of God?

Our understanding of God impacts every area of our lives. Here are some reasons we're taking an entire night of class to study Theology Proper and what the Bible says about who God really is:

- *To relate to him with joy.*

Read **Psalm 149:1-5**

This is not a sterile, scholastic, abstract body of knowledge. If we understand who God is, we should be awed by his greatness and goodness, and be motivated to worship Him. Not only should we praise God for what he *does*, but also for who he *is*!

In Exodus 33, Moses asked God to reveal his glory to him:

(Ex. 33:18) Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!"

God responded to Moses' request:

(Ex. 34:6-8) Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; (7) who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished ... (8) And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.**

Aside: Notice that God's glory is revealed not primarily in experiencing his power, but by understanding his character revealed by his word. This is an important realization today when people seek a subjective experience of God's power more than an understanding of his character as revealed through scripture.

e.g. In Rudolf Otto's influential book, *The Idea of the Holy*, he argues that there is an experience of the numinous (the sense of the other) that is the core of all religions. But this is too vague. Our sense of awe is grounded in CONTENT that God has revealed about himself.

God's self-distillation of his Person (in response to Moses' request in Ex. 33:18) is that he is both RIGHTEOUS and GRACIOUS, both JUST and MERCIFUL. These are the essence of who God is and both are good (33:19).

Moses' immediate response to this increased and accurate awareness of who God is was to bow down and worship him.

Aside: God's JUSTICE defines the dilemma between humans and God, and his MERCY is the way he resolves this dilemma. Over the next two weeks we'll explore how in the cross, God found a way to maintain his justice and yet still extend mercy (to be both "just and the justifier" for mankind – Romans 3:26).

Instructors, students may ask about the phrase "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations" in Exodus 34:7. Refer them to Ezekiel 18:14-20 (especially vs 20) and Exodus 20:4-6. The point is, sin in one generation will effect the generations that follow (e.g. abusive parents have an effect on their families that lasts several generations), but each person is responsible for their own sin. God will hold people accountable for their sin in whatever generation they turn away from Him.

- *To avoid our tendency to anthropomorphize (define) God.*

Unless we have a biblical view of God and stay focused on him, our Christianity will tend to be humanistic: done by our power and dependent only on human wisdom (see J. B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small*), but this calls for God's rebuke (Ps. 50:21 " . . . you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you . . . "; Is 55:8,9 "My ways are not your ways...").

That said, God's attributes (see below) are often relayed to us in the Bible in very warm, human terms. "God is pictured as a father, a shepherd, a friend."¹

>> This also manifests itself in attributing to God the weaknesses of key authority figures in our past life.

- *To resist Satan's attempts to distort your view of God.*

Satan wants to distort your view of God so that your own walk will be hurt and your communication about God to others will be distorted. If you're discipling a young Christian, helping them establish and maintain an accurate view of God is one of the first areas you should address.

We'll also see later in this lecture that many religious aberrations stem from Satan's work in distorting who God really is.

- *To communicate who God is accurately in our culture.*

When communicating to non-Christians about Christianity, we should realize their need to understand the biblical view of God before they will appreciate the Gospel.

Many in our culture today do not believe in an infinite and personal God. We cannot assume that when we use the word "God," they are thinking of the God of the Bible.

Non-Christians and even new Christians often wonder: “Did someone create God?” “Will God change his mind about me?” “How is the God of the Bible different from Hindu or Muslim views of God?” We need to know how to respond to those questions.

Even in this class we should realize many of us are bringing views of God that are profoundly unbiblical.

Contrasting Views of God

Before we study the God of the Bible in more detail, we will briefly examine contrasting views of God or ultimate reality. Most people's view of ultimate reality is an amalgam of many of these views. What follows is a brief overview of several views of God:

- **Monotheism (also called "theism"):**
There is one infinite-personal-righteous God. This view of God is found only among religions which are based on the Bible. Judaism and Islam are both monotheistic, but differ from Christianity in many important areas.

Man's problem: true moral guilt before a righteous God.

Solution: Our guilt requires cleansing or forgiveness.
- **Deism:**
God exists, but he is uninvolved in human affairs. Deists recognize that a Supreme Being exists who created the universe, but view him as uninvolved with human affairs. Deism was an 18th century way-station between theism and atheism. Many Americans are still practical deists.
- **Atheism:**
No God exists. Reality is confined to that which can be empirically verified. This view is also called "naturalism," emphasizing its denial of the supernatural. This is a very recent worldview and it undergirds much western scientism.
- **Animism:**
Spirits inhabit animate and inanimate matter. They are the cause of most good and ill fortune, and humans must placate them or control them to succeed in life. Most tribal religions (including Native American spirituality) are animistic. Most animism is occultic in the sense that humans can control the spirit world through attaining certain knowledge, sympathetic ritual, etc.

Man's problem: placating and controlling the spirits.

Solution: ritual sacrifice, occultism, sympathetic magic, etc.

Note: Some anthropologists believe that human religions "devolved" from belief in a single creator God to animism (see *Eternity in Their Hearts*, by Richardson).

- **Polytheism:**
There are many personal (but not infinite) gods. The Greek and Roman pantheons are well-known examples of polytheism. This belief appears to be a projection of human characteristics (including limitations and character flaws). The gods are personal yet finite anthropomorphic projections of fallen humanity.
- **Pantheism/monism:**
God is the impersonal life-force that permeates the world. God is infinite, yet impersonal. Ultimate reality is oneness; all distinctions (including persons) are illusory. Classical Hinduism and Buddhism are well-known examples of pantheism. Western notions of the ultimate state in pantheistic religions is often mistaken. Nirvana (Buddhist) and Moksha (Hindu) are not personal, conscious states of bliss but a loss of individual personality when we are merged with the all.

Man's problem: the illusion of individuality; ignorance of oneness with all that is

Solution: enlightenment regarding our oneness

- **Dualism:**
Ultimate reality is equal opposing forces or persons. Dualism recognizes the moral and personal distinctions that pantheism denies, but elevates them to ultimate reality. For example, Zoroastrianism's Ahriman and Ohrmazd are opposing persons. Taoism's yin and yang, and Star Wars' "The Force" are examples of theological dualism.

Man's problem: imbalance between forces.

Solution: restoring balance. We see this today in some forms of Alternative medicine in which the medical problem is thought to center on an imbalanced energy field (Therapeutic Touch, Ayurvedic Medicine).

Some people mistakenly think of Christianity this way, with Satan and Jesus as the equal and opposing persons. In fact, Satan is a creature in God's universe. God is infinitely more powerful.

- **New Age:**
New Age views of God are often drawn from a variety of influences - pantheism, animism, dualism, occultism and western individualism.

Man's problem: we don't realize that we're already god.

Solution: realize you are God and create your own reality.

Read James Sire's book, *The Universe Next Door*, for more information on this New Age spirituality.

- **Postmodernism:**
Ultimate reality is purely a matter of individual/social perception. There is nothing "out there" independent of human/social construction. Therefore, western monotheism and eastern pantheism, though logically contradictory, are mutually "true" in the sense that they are the paradigms through which different societies construct reality. It should be obvious why this view is more sympathetic to eastern religions (which assert that all religions are imperfect attempts to describe ultimate reality)—both deny the ability to have "the truth" about God and reject the law of non-contradiction.

Remember: *You will not meet people who are purists in any of these areas* but you'll hear hints of many of these views in what they say. Part of our job as evangelists is to help people sort through and understand their own beliefs and see key ways the biblical world view is different.

The Self-Revelation of God

Where should humans turn to find information about who God is and what he is like? There are only two options.

Speculation: *What humans think about God and ultimate reality.* Speculation is humans reasoning from themselves and coming up with their own idea of who God is or the nature of ultimate reality. Except for monotheism, the above views are largely speculation.

>> Descartes and the Enlightenment, reasoning from "I think therefore I am."

Revelation: *What God communicates about himself to us.* There are two types of revelation...

- **General Revelation:** *What God has revealed about himself to ALL people.*

- **Special Revelation:** *What God has revealed about himself and his purpose to individuals and which is available to us through scripture.*

General Revelation	Special Revelation
available to all people	available to some individuals
revealed through creation or from within	revealed in scripture
less detailed	more detailed

What can be known from general revelation? Several biblical passages, including Romans 1 and 2, tell us that certain facts about God may be learned from observing his creation.

(Rom. 1:19-20) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

See also Psalm 19.

- *God is personal.* This is inferred from “what has been made” (intelligence) and from within (can our own personality come from divine impersonality?).
- *God is powerful.* This is inferred from the immensity of creation. God must be bigger and more powerful than creation because he brought it into being and sustains it.
- *God is eternal.* This is also inferred from creation. God predates creation. He must be the uncaused Cause for there to be a creation.

(Rom. 2:14-15) Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, (15) since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

- *God is moral.* This is inferred from the moral conscience universally present in humans (Rom. 2:14,15).

Note: *General revelation contradicts many of the central tenets of other religions.* For example, pantheists believe that God is impersonal, yet we can discern from creation and our own makeup that God is personal. Many religions teach that we can be morally acceptable to God by performing good works, but our conscience bears witness that we sin and break God’s

moral standard. Because of this, *the honest person without access to the Bible will not be a devout animist, pantheist, etc.* Paul says they know enough about the true God from general revelation to be justly judged for idolatry (“they are without excuse” – Rom. 1:20).

We must resist the popular idea that people's religious beliefs are determined by their religious environment. While this may be a strong influence, God says he has revealed himself sufficiently through nature and conscience so that honest people will realize that their (non-biblical) religious environment is false or inadequate. Many testimonies from the mission field confirm this.

What are the limitations of general revelation? Christians disagree whether general revelation is sufficient for a saving knowledge of God. Our view is that a non-Christian who responds in faith to the revelation they have received can be saved. For more on this see the handout titled *Is it necessary to hear the gospel to be saved?* by Gary DeLashmutt.

- *We cannot learn about God's plan for salvation from general revelation.* We can infer that God is moral and that we fall short, but we can't know *if* he has a plan of forgiveness, or *what* that plan is if he has one. This all comes from special revelation.
- *We could easily be led astray apart from special revelation.* Without knowledge of the Fall (special revelation), we could easily conclude that humans and nature are in their normal state. What does this tell us about the Creator?

Special Revelation: The unity & diversity of God

What is meant by the “trinity?”

- *Three in person, one in essence.* God exists as three distinguishable persons, but is one and inseparable in his being, divine nature, and purpose. Tri-unity, a threeness and a oneness. Three persons who have different roles in God's redemptive plan but who share the same being, attributes, purpose, and love for each other.
- *“Trinity” does not imply modalism.* Modalism is the heretical position that there is only one person in the Godhead who manifests himself in three forms or manners. You may have heard someone compare the trinity to one person who plays three different roles, like a man who is a son to his father, a husband to his wife, and father to his children. Analogies like this emphasize God's unity at the expense of his diversity. Rather, God exists simultaneously as three different persons. He is three people, but one essence.

- *The trinity is incomprehensible, but not logically contradictory or irrational.* Critics who claim that the trinity is the same as saying "3 = 1" are wrong, because the "threeness" has to do with personhood, while the "oneness" has to do with essence.

(Millard Erickson) "Those aspects of God which we never fully comprehend should be regarded as mysteries that go beyond our reason rather than as paradoxes which conflict with reason."²

E.g. Most of us are not able to explain how a Xerox copier works, but that doesn't mean it is logically absurd.

- *Trinity is not a term that the Bible uses, but a description of what the biblical data suggest. The father is described as God (Matt. 6:26,30), Jesus is God (Heb. 1:8; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9), the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3,4; 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Cor. 6:19,20; 2 Cor. 13:14; Jn. 16:9-11), but God is one (Deut. 6:4).* Next week, we will show that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God. In Christian Growth, we showed how the Holy Spirit is God. And the Father, of course, is repeatedly referred to as God. Each member of the trinity is a separate person and yet they are each fully divine.

If God is a trinity, then we would expect the Bible to describe him as a unity, but also hint at his diversity. In fact, that's exactly what we find.

Scripture's emphasis on the *unity* of God

(Deut. 6:4) Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

(Isaiah 45:5) I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.

(1 Timothy 2:5) For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

(James 2:19) You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

Scripture's emphasis on the *diversity* of God.

This is not an NT innovation brought about by the church. While the OT does not provide a detailed development of the Trinity, it does provide hints that God exists as a plurality of Persons.

Old Testament:

(Genesis 1:26,27) Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

- *God refers to himself in the plural ("let us" & "in our"), yet the verb ("said") is singular. God's reference to himself as "our" seems in context to imply a plurality within unity—the creation of humans as one ("man") yet plural ("male and female") is a picture of what God is like.*

(Joshua 5:13-15) Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"(14) "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"(15) The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Note: In the New American Standard Bible, when the words "LORD" or "GOD" are in all caps, the Hebrew word being used is YAHWEH (YHWH). YHWH refers exclusively to God. The terms "Adonai" and "Elohim," are also used to refer to God, but can refer to other persons. Their meaning is determined by the context.

- *The commander is portrayed as God, even though he seems distinct from the LORD (YHWH). Notice that he allows Joshua to bow down to him. This is unexpected, because in the Bible, only God is to be worshipped. Angels mistaken for the Lord forbid people to worship them (see Rev 19:10). Notice also that the commander uses the same phrase, "take off your sandals..., " that God used with Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-6). Like the commander in this passage, the angel of the Lord in Exodus 3 is described as being distinct from the Lord and yet somehow is the Lord (see another example of this in Genesis 22:9-19). It's also interesting to note that Jesus Christ is described as the commander of the Lord's army in Revelation 19:14!*

(Isa. 48:12-16) Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. (13) Surely

My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together. (14) Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall carry out His good pleasure on Babylon, And His arm shall be against the Chaldeans. (15) I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and He will make his ways successful. (16) Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit.

- *The speaker is God because he is eternal ("first and last" - Isaiah 41:4), the Creator (vs 13 - Isaiah 42:5). Yet he also says YHWH sent him (vs 16b). Therefore, unless the speaker in vs 16b is a new speaker (as some assert), there are at least two Persons who are called YHWH. This passage does not prove the Spirit is God (vs 16); it simply suggests that there are at least two Persons who are both YHWH.*

New Testament:

(Matt. 28:19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the *name* of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . .

- *This passage indicates that God is one Being ("name" is singular) who exists as three Persons.*

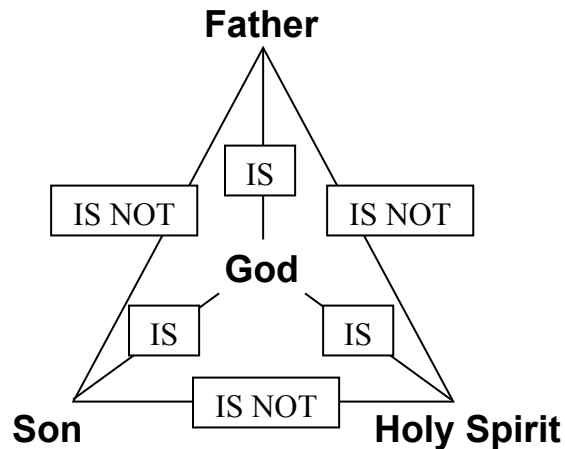
Many other NT passages (e.g. those that assert the deity of Jesus and the HS) provide scriptural material for the Trinity. We will cover those passages in Christology and Pneumatology.

Analogies:

Instructors, prompt students to use what they know about the Trinity to identify the weaknesses in each of these analogies.

We use analogies to try to understand and illustrate the tri-unity of God. Bear in mind that these analogies are limited—they tend to emphasize either God's unity or his diversity. But these might help in a conversation with someone who doesn't understand this part of who God is.

- **Diagram:**



- **Other Illustrations:**

Identical twins: They share the same genetic material, so that their bodies even accept one another's organs. Yet they are clearly separate persons who marry different spouses, have different careers, etc. Weakness: Since the twins are two distinct beings, this analogy overemphasizes diversity at the expense of unity.

Water's "triple point": At a certain pressure and temperature, different water molecules exist as ice, water, and steam. One essence simultaneously existing in three separate forms. Weakness: DIFFERENT water molecules are in different states. This underemphasizes unity.

Marriage: Two distinct persons who maintain their personhood but who become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24) as their lives are united in many ways: physically, love relationship, etc. Weakness: God is not just relationally unified. He shares one being (essence) despite being three persons.

Summary: Why is the trinity important?

While the doctrine of the trinity is difficult to comprehend or explain, the alternative (no Trinity) presents more serious problems. **The Trinity...**

- *Resolves the tension between God's love and his self-existence.* There was always love between the Persons of the Godhead (Jn 17:5,24). The doctrine of the trinity explains how God can be eternal but not solitary. He has always had relationships and expressing love is central to his character. How can God be loving and personal without having relationships? This is unresolved in Judaism and Islam.

- *Provides a basis for personal love relationships.* Human love relationships are not a biological accident—they are a reflection of the very nature of God and ultimate reality. God is a community of love relationships, and because we are made in God's image we value them.
- *Makes the incarnation possible* (more on this in Christology).

The attributes of God

These terms themselves aren't necessarily found in the Bible. Nor do they provide an exhaustive description of God. They describe how God is portrayed in the Bible and help us, as finite beings, understand what God is like.

Some attributes are UNIQUE to God; others are shared in COMMON with humans – especially before the fall (e.g. love, veracity). With each attribute, we will consider whether it is common (shared by humans as part of the *image of God*) or unique (only seen in God).

These attributes do not negate each other; they are interrelated (e.g. God exercises his power in a way that's consistent with his love and justice).

Instructors, cover each attribute, but pick 2-3 attributes to dwell on more heavily and discuss. Ask students, “If your disciples didn’t truly believe in/ understand this particular attribute of God, what type of attitudes and behaviors might we expect to see?”

Omniscient (Unique)

Definition: *God knows all things actual or possible.* Contra “the openness of God.”

Scriptural Evidence: (Ps. 147:5; Isa. 40:28)

(Psa. 147:5) Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Application:

- *We can never surprise God by sinning.* God has always known what we are like and what we will do. Nor can we hide from God (our reluctance to admit our sin to God).
- *God knows what we need better than we do.* Because we are both finite and fallen, we need to cultivate the habit of looking outside ourselves to God (through his Word) for direction rather than trusting our own inward thoughts and feelings.

(*CONTRA THERAPEUTIC EMPHASIS*: i.e., the individual as the one who instinctively knows the way to health—the problem is repressive people, society, etc.)

- Ps. 139:23,24 – corrective to introspection. If we deal honestly with God, we can trust that he will show us what we need to see about ourselves when we need to see it (Phil. 3:15).
(*CONTRA THERAPEUTIC EMPHASIS*)

Omnipresent (Unique)

Definition: *God transcends all limits of space and time.*

Scriptural Evidence:

(Psa. 139:7-10) Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? (8) If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. (9) If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, (10) even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

Application:

- *God is not confined to a "sanctuary"*—you can talk to him anywhere at any time (Acts 7:48-50; 1 Thess. 5:17).
- *No dichotomous living (sacred/secular):* all things are to be done "as unto the Lord" (Col. 3:17).
- No matter how lonely you may feel, or no matter how isolated from other people you may be (CHRISTIAN PRISONERS), *God is always accessible to us.*
- SCHAEFFER: "Because God is infinite and personal, he is capable of relating to each of us as though we were the only person in the universe. *He is able to give us his full attention.*" (CONTRA C.E.O. WHO IS TOO BUSY TO TALK TO YOU UNLESS IT IS "REALLY IMPORTANT")
- Prayer: *You don't have to pray at the site where you would like God to work.* Prayer for missionaries across the world is as effective as if we were right there with them.

Omnipotent (Unique)

Definition: *God can do whatever he wants to do.*

Note: *God cannot do things that are logically impossible (e.g. make a square circle), violate his own character (e.g. act cruelly,*

fail to do what he has promised, etc.), *or undo the past* (though he may release us from its consequences and even the memory of it).

Scriptural Evidence: (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17) The name "Almighty God" (*El Shaddai*) also implies omnipotence.

(Jer. 32:17) "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."

Application:

- *The miraculous is no more impossible for God than the non-miraculous.* These are distinctions that we make, not God. Both are equally possible for him. Problems with the possibility (not documentation of) miracles are ultimately presuppositional rather than logical, etc. (JONAH; RESURRECTED BODIES).
- *God is able to sanctify us.* Specifically, God is able to change our characters, no matter how big our problems are (Eph. 1:18-20; 3:20; Phil. 4:13). SANCTIFICATION
- *God is able to use you to accomplish his purposes.* - (2 Cor. 3:6; 12:10). MINISTRY
- *There is no one so lost that God is not able to convict/draw them* (Jn. 16:8). EVANGELISM
- *God is more powerful than Satan* (I Jn. 4:4). **CONTRA SECULAR OCCULT MOVIES WHICH PORTRAY HIM AS GOD'S EQUAL OR MORE ("THE OMEN").**

Sovereign (Unique)

Definition: *God owns, rules, and sustains the creation. No one and nothing can thwart him from ultimately accomplishing his purposes.*

God is so wise, loving & powerful that he can work in all situations – even foolish and evil human choices – in such a way that his plan is advanced and our highest good is achieved. Human choices are not the final word!

Scriptural Evidence: (Gen. 14:19; Acts 17:24-28; Ps. 24:1ff)

(Acts 17:24-28) "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. (25) And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact

places where they should live. (27) God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. (28) 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Application:

- *Even Satan is under God's ultimate sovereignty, and can do nothing that God has not allowed him to do (Job; Luke 22:31,32; 1 Cor. 10:13 >> CROSS; 1 Cor. 2:8).*
- *When we act under God's authority (Matt. 28:18,19) Satan has no authority over us. But this doesn't mean that we are out of the battle . . .*
- *It is wrong for us to think that we have authority over our own lives or our own possessions, since *all we have, and even our own selves belong to God.**
- *Rom. 8:28 – God is able work for good even when you make poor choices (others and yours) if you are committed to his purpose. It is wrong to blame others for our problems when God could have prevented it from occurring. Look for God's sovereign purposes in misfortune (Gen. 50:20). (ANTI-VICTIM)*
- *Basis for hope: God's purposes will ultimately prevail! You are on the winning side!!*

Loving (Common)

Definition: As God's love is expressed toward humanity, it means that *God always views humanity with compassion and acts for its best interest.*

Note: *We cannot use God's love to erase his other attributes—like his justice (see Ex. 34:6-8). Contra universalists and those who deny the reality of hell.*

Scriptural Evidence: (1 Jn. 4:8,16; Isaiah 30:18-21;49:14-16) His proper name Yahweh is associated with his goodness grace and compassion (Ex. 33:17-20; Joel 2:13;Psalm 86:15).

(1 Jn. 4:8,16) Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love . . .(16) And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

Application:

- *Never pit God's will against your good or other people's good.* The issue is how to attain this good: my way or God's way. When we disobey God's will, we say, "I don't trust that you love me."
- *We can trust God, even when he is disciplining us.* He is always actively involved in our lives for our good (Heb. 12:4,5). (DISCIPLINE vs. RETRIBUTION)
- *There is no reason to be afraid of God as believers.* (1 John 4:18) While we should respect him, we need never fear his rejection or retribution. Deut. 10:12,13 defines "fear of God" in the proper sense.

Righteous (Common)

Definition: *God is the essence of moral goodness.*

Scriptural Evidence: (Mark 10:18; Job 34:10; Hab. 1:13)

(Hab. 1:13) Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

Application:

- *This is the basis of absolute morality (CONTRA MORAL RELATIVISM & POSTMODERNISM).*

(Ravi Zacharias) "Not all atheists are immoral, but morality as goodness cannot be justified with atheistic presuppositions. An atheist may be morally minded, but he just happens to be living better than his belief about the nature of man warrants. He may have personal moral values, but he cannot have any sense of compelling and universal moral obligation. Moral duty cannot logically operate without a moral law; and there is no moral law in an amoral world." (Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage* [Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1990], p. 61,62)

- *We could never work our way to God.*
- *When we want to be sanctified in our lives, we should look to God's character.* Even though others can disciple us and be models of some character areas, they will always present a mixed picture. We always need to look ultimately to Christ himself. Look also at the Fruit of the spirit. Are we making progress (1 Tim. 4:15- " . . . that others may see your progress.")

- *Righteousness is not merely the absence of the bad; it is the active presence of the good* (1 Thess. 3:11,12). SINS OF OMISSION (Jas. 4:17)

Immutable (Unique)

Definition: *God doesn't change with regard to his attributes or promises.*

Note: Not with regard to his emotions since he is emotional. He also introduces changes in his redemptive program.

Scriptural Evidence: (Heb. 13:8; James 1:17; 1 Sam. 15:29)

(1 Sam. 15:29) He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.

Application:

- *Progressive revelation doesn't mean that God has evolved, only that he has revealed more of the plan to us. CONTRA PROCESS THEOLOGY- as man has evolved, so has God.*
- *God's promises are always true no matter how I feel.*
EXAMPLE: If I am experiencing alienation in my walk with God, it isn't because God has rejected me (though he may be grieved) >> Rom. 8:1
- *What about God "repenting?"* (Ex. 32:10-14) When given proper grounds for doing so, God can & does change his actions & emotions. In scripture, three grounds are given for God's repenting':
 - Intercession (Amos 7:1-6)
 - Repentance of the people (Jer 18:7-10)
 - Compassion (Is 54:7-8)

In Ex 32, God may have been acting out a divine drama where Moses was a type of Christ as an intercessor (1 Cor. 10).

Veracity (Common)

Definition: *God is truthful and faithful to his Word.*

Scriptural Evidence: (Heb. 6:18; Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; 2 Tim 2:13)

(Heb. 6:18) God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

(Titus 1:2) . . . a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time . . .

Application:

- *God's revelation to us is the definition of truth* (Jn. 17:17) >> INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE
- *God is utterly faithful* (2 Tim. 2:13; Rom. 3:3,4). He will always keep all of his promises no matter what. However, you must distinguish between *conditional* (Rom. 8:28; Matt. 6:33) & *unconditional* promises (Rom. 8:1; Heb. 13:5).

Self-Existent (unique)

Definition: *God is totally independent—the only non-contingent being in the universe.* The base or cause of God's existence is himself. See divine name YHWH.

Scriptural Evidence: (Ex. 3:14; Jn. 8:58; Isa. 40:28; Acts 17:25)

(Ex. 3:14) God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Application:

- *God cannot be manipulated by his creation*, because he is not dependent on it. This undercuts the basis of occultic magic and chants.
- *The essence of sin is to not acknowledge your dependence upon God* (Gen. 3:6; Isa. 14:14).
- *HUMAN AGENCY should never be understood to mean that God needs man.* God doesn't need us to love him, to minister for him, to give him money, etc. These are *privileges* of grace.
- *God exists objectively and is the way he is completely apart from our perception of him* (like gravity). The postmodern view that God's existence and nature are ultimately subjective (individual's or culture's perception) is false. The value of our beliefs about God is not that they create him, but (hopefully) that they correspond to the way he really is.

Just (common)

Definition: *God does what his righteousness demands* (reward, punishment, deliverance). His justice operates retributively only towards

sinful beings apart from Christ, and he rewards Christ and those who are in him.

Scriptural Evidence: (Rom. 2:1-5; Gen. 18:25; Ps. 19:9)

(Rom. 2:2,5) Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth . . .(5) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

(Gen. 18:25) Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Application:

- *I should never ask God to give me "what I deserve."* The moment that you sin the first time, you forfeit forever any chance for justice to operate toward you in a positive way (LIKE NAZI WAR CRIMINALS AT NUREMBURG DEMANDING JUSTICE). WHAT ABOUT REWARDS? This should be seen as "grace upon grace."
- *To avenge another in interpersonal relationships is to usurp God's role* (Rom. 12:14,17,19). This is why all bitterness is wrong (as well as because God has dealt with us under grace [Eph 4:32]). It is therefore not proper to speak of justice/rights within interpersonal relationships.
- *God wants to hear about your worries and frustrations, but not at the expense of faith in his justice.* (e.g. Psalm 73) God often is on a different timetable for executing his justice than we would prefer.

Note: Legal/civil justice is valid, but it is always partial and imperfect, and left to the civil authorities to execute (Rom. 13:4).

Infinite (Unique)

Definition: *God's attributes are free from all limitations.*

Scriptural Evidence: (Ps. 90:2)

(Psalm 90:2) Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Application:

- *Eternity will never be boring* because we can never exhaust the depths of God's kindness (Eph 2:7) or his wisdom (Rom 11:33).
- By virtue of his deity, *Jesus was able to endure the infinite wrath of his against sin in a finite amount of time* (Heb. 10:10,14). A finite being would have to endure the wrath of God over an infinite amount of time >> HELL

Memory Verses

Ex. 34:6-8 - God's character is awesome and worthy of worship. God is both just and merciful in his dealings with humans.**

Gen. 1:26,27 - God exists as more than one Person.**

Assignment

- **Complete the *Genesis 3-11 Assignment*.**
- **Begin working on the *Church Visitation Assignment*. This assignment is due on the final week of class and required to pass the course.**

¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Baker, 1st edition) p. 299.

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Baker, 1st edition) p. 338.