

Who is God?

The nature, attributes, and existence
of the Triune God

Review

- Why seek to know and understand God?
 - An unknown God cannot be loved, trusted, served, or worshiped.
- Because of sin, **the basic starting point** for all sound theology comes from God's revelation in Christ.
- Creator-Creator distinction: God is very different from us, as we are creatures.
- Accommodation: God has condescended to us and uses human language (baby-talk) in revealing Himself

Review

- **Story of scripture:** God reveals Himself in the drama of redemption, and then defines what those events mean for us.
- **The names of God:** reveal His character: “I Am”
 - Transcendent, self-existent, etc.
- **Incommunicable** attributes: attributes that we do not share with God.
 - Communicable attributes: where there is some commonality, such as ‘freedom’.
- **Simplicity:** 1689 LBC: “without parts”
 - His existence and His attributes are identical
 - Example: He always acts with 100% love and 100% justice.

Today's Agenda

1. God's self-existence: Aseity

1. God's immutability

1. God's impassibility (He is without passions)

- *LBC 2:1 - "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."*

God's Self-Existence: Aseity

- God is completely independent and outside of the world:
 - Psalm 115:3 – *“Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases.”*
 - Other texts that underscore God’s universal lordship are also evidence of His independency.
 - John 5:26 – *“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”*
 - *“life in Himself” = God’s self-existence; Son’s here too.*
- God is self-caused:
 - He is the “I Am”. He doesn’t just ‘exist’; He **is** existence.
 - Acts 17: *“In Him we live and move and have our being”*
 - Our existence is contingent upon Him/His existence: there is an irreversible relationship between God and the world.
 - In no sense at all does God live and move and have our being in us and in our existence.
 - Rather, the world is related to God.
 - God is the source of all being and we exist by his will.

God's Self-Existence: Aseity

- God does not need creation: Nothing but God's free decision is responsible for the existence of creation.
 - This should make Him all the more glorious to us.
 - His love and covenants become great wonders in light of His self-existence.
 - He doesn't need anyone, and yet he chooses to enter into the most intimate bonds of love, even to the point of crucifying his own son to save sinners.
- If God is tied to the world in some way, then the incarnation is no big deal.
 - Example: God needs the world in order to fully manifest His glory.
 - This undermines the wonder and love of God in the incarnation: He freely chose to enter the world and save His people.
- God's freedom from creation is essential to affirming His freedom for creation.
 - He doesn't have true freedom if He is tied to it.
 - He can't help but become involved (incarnation) if He needs the world as much as the world needs Him.

God's Self-Existence: Aseity

- Romans 11:33-36 -

- *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

- We don't give God anything.
- He gets nothing from us that He needs.
- How amazing it is that He decided to create, to enter into covenant, to love, etc., when he was full and complete in and of Himself!

Immutability

- The simplicity of God and His self-existence go hand-in-hand with His immutability:
 - God does not change.
 - He does not change in His essential qualities (attributes)
 - He does not change in His decrees (eternal decrees)
 - He does not change in response to the actions of creatures
 - He is ‘without passions’; the impassibility of God

Immutability

- Psalm 102:25-27 –

- *“Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.”*

- James 1:17 –

- *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”*

Immutability

- He cannot change because He is perfect:
 - This extends to who He is (attributes):
 - He doesn't change and become evil, or unloving.
 - Example: “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb 6:18/Titus 1:2)
 - It is impossible because He is immutable.
 - And also extends to His eternal decrees:
 - If He changes His decree, then He is not eternal; outside of time and creation.
 - He cannot ‘learn’ anything, for that would imply that He doesn't know all things to begin with.
- Question: What about scriptures that tell us that God is affected by the world, that He gets angry, that He is moved to compassion, that He regrets?

Immutability

- Some examples:
 - **Jonah 3:10** – *“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.”*
 - **Gen 6:6-7** – *“And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”*
- This touches on the doctrine of impassability
 - When the Confession says that God is ‘without passions’, ‘passion’ comes from the Late Latin *passio*, which means ‘to suffer’.
 - I.E. – The passion of Christ; His suffering and death.

Impassibility

- Impassibility: God does not suffer means that He is not the passive recipient of being acted upon by the outside.
 - For example, to experience regret because of the actions of another is to suffer emotively in reaction to their behavior.
 - A change results in that regret comes to exist where previously it did not, because of some outside influence.
- Thus, to say that God is “without passions” is to affirm that God does not suffer;
 - He is not passive in the sense that He is not taken captive by the actions of creatures.

Impassibility

- How do we square this with the passages indicating God changed?
- Remember the doctrine of analogy:
 - God speaks to us in human language (baby-talk); in ways that we can understand.
 - He also presents Himself as a real actor in the drama of redemption:
 - He enters covenant with us; He reveals His will over changing times and circumstances, etc.
 - The Jonah example: He relents from executing the punishment He had already said was coming to the unrepentant.
 - These passages communicate what God does from a human standpoint:
 - From the perspective of a creature, within creation and time.

Impassibility

- Example: 1 Sam 15:11 –
 - *“The word of the LORD came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night.”*
 - But we must keep reading, to V28-29:
 - *“And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”*
- This was never true regret like WE have regret.
 - Tearing the kingdom from Saul was God’s /decree plan all along.
 - But He presents Himself as a real actor in the drama of redemption.
 - And from our perspective (not His perspective), it appears that He has regret.

Impassibility

- Repentance in God must not be understood with respect to His counsel, His will, nor to affection or internal grief, *but to the effect and external work because He does what a penitent man usually does.*
 - (F. Turriten)
 - In other words, what changes in redemptive history is not God's emotive state.
 - He does not have emotions/passions – these are intrinsically human characteristics (it is impossible for God to 'have regret' just as it is impossible for Him to not be eternal).
 - The change is simply in the manifestation of Himself and the revelation of God's work in the world.
 - The change then is not in God, but in man and in man's relations to God.

Impassibility & Immutability

- Why does it matter?
 - Mal. 3:6 – *“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”*
 - Essentially: ‘I do not change, so I am not fickle, therefore you are not consumed’.
 - What great news is it that we do not change God!
 - As if today He loves you and tomorrow He changes His mind.
 - This doctrine is presented in scripture as our comfort, our hope, our security.
 - Lam 3:22 – *“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”*

Conclusion:

- **Simplicity:**
 - Leaves no room for God to change and choose to express love over anger, or forgiveness over justice.
 - Gets rid of any capriciousness in God or conflict in His being, as God is the sum total of all His attributes.
- **God's self-existence/independence (aesity):**
 - No essential need in God for creation, as He is free from it and thus cannot be surprised by it, overwhelmed by it, or unwillingly tied to it.
- **God's immutability:**
 - He is perfect, complete, lacking nothing, as any change would either be for better or for worse.
- **God's impassibility:**
 - He is not acted upon from the outside.
 - He does not have the capacity for changing emotions from within.
 - He is not subject to sensational changes/feelings as the result of human actions