

An Outline of
The Doctrine of God (Theology Proper)

A Biblical and Systematic Approach to
Historic Christian Theism

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General Outline of Study

INTRODUCTION

EPISTEMOLOGY: Christian Approach to the Study of God

WORLDVIEWS CONCERNING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

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THE NAMES OF GOD

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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AND HIS DECREE

INTRODUCTION:

The significance and purpose of this study:

To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? – Isaiah 40:18

Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? – Job 11:7

*“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”
– A.W. Tozer ¹*

“...one supreme purpose is revealed in all that God has done or will do, from the beginning of creation to the farthest reaches of eternity. This supreme purpose is the manifestation of the glory of God. For this one purpose angels were created, the material universe was designed to

¹ A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of The Holy, 1961, Harper San Francisco, p. 1.

reflect that glory, and man was created in the image and likeness of God, even sin was permitted, and redemption was provided with a view toward the realization of this supreme purpose.” — Lewis Sperry Chafer²

The Great Theme and Purpose of the Bible:

The importance of the study of Theology Proper stems from the great theme of Scriptures, which I believe to be the manifold **glory of God**:

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. — Psalm 19:1 (NKJV)

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! — Psalm 46:10 (NKJV)

And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" — Isaiah 6:3 (NKJV)

...and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? — Romans 9:23 (NKJV)

...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. — Philippians 2:11 (NKJV)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; — 1 Peter 2:9 (NASB)

Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things and because of Your will they existed, and were created. — Revelation 4:11 (NASB)

Definitions:

Theology: from Greek *theos* (God) + *logos* (something said; word, discourse, saying (expression, message, teaching, etc.) = teaching or study of God (implies organization).

General meaning: study of all Christian doctrine.

Theology Proper: study of the doctrine of God.

Metaphysics: (“beyond or behind the physical”)

- The science of essential principles
- The study of ultimate reality
- How did man come about and what is his purpose?
- Constructing a worldview

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, Major Bible Themes, Revised by John Walvoord, 1974, Zondervan, p. 28.

Epistemology: (from Greek *epistemos* – “knowledge”)

- The study of the possibility and nature of knowledge
- Justification of belief
- How we know and how we know that we know

I. **Epistemology: The Christian Approach to the Study of God**

Secular epistemology: One must *understand* in order to know (i.e., “prove” through experimental and empirical means)

Christian epistemology: maintains *two* paths to knowledge:

- Empirical knowledge through experimentation (as above)
- Revelation (supernatural)
- Example: The Virgin Birth of Christ – we *know* this fact because it was revealed (knowledge); yet we do not *understand* it (empirically)
- Scriptures presuppose certain things as facts – (truths revealed and accepted by faith, with no visible or written proof) – see **Heb. 11:1, 6**

Faith Precedes Knowledge:

Augustine put forward the idea of the « *ordo scientia* » (the order of knowledge), in which he postulated that belief precedes reason, grace reestablishes nature, and faith renews philosophy. Hence, we do not reason clearly in order to arrive at faith; if we do not believe, we will not succeed in reasoning correctly.

God as Revealed in Scripture:

The God of the Bible:

- Sovereign Creator of the Universe
- Infinite God
- Personal and Moral God
- God Who is Transcendent and Immanent
- God of revelation

Divine Communication:

- God is a Person (Intelligence, Emotions, Will)
- God has revealed Himself to His creatures, created in His image
- God has revealed Himself through objective, propositional (cognitive) Truth
- The Bible is God’s revelation to mankind

Thinking About It

1. In practical terms, how do we demonstrate a “high” or a “low” view of God?
2. Can you explain the difference between “theism” and “Christian theism”?
3. In simple terms, explain what is meant by *epistemology*
4. Do you agree that “faith precedes knowledge”? Why?

II. Worldviews Concerning God and the Universe

A. Atheism

Atheism (by etymology “no god”) is the worldview that maintains *a world without God*, i.e., that there is no god either beyond, or in the world. As a belief system, it claims to know that God does not exist.

Biblical Response: Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:18-21

B. Agnosticism

Etymologically, an agnostic is “without knowledge” of God’s existence; thus, practical agnosticism is the belief that one *does not know* if God exists, and philosophical agnosticism is the belief that one *cannot know* if God exists.

Biblical Response: Psalm 8; 19:1; Romans 1:19-20.

C. Naturalism

Naturalism is the worldview that holds that *nature is the whole of reality*, or ultimate reality.

Biblical Response: Genesis 1:1ff; Psalm 14:1; Isaiah 40:8, 18, 25-26; Hebrews 11:3.

D. Deism

Deism is the worldview that proposes a *world created by God but on its own*. Deism denies the immanence of God in the world, special revelation, and the miraculous. An infinite God has created the world but does not intervene, allowing it to function through natural laws.

Biblical Response: Genesis 3:8; Exodus 3:2; Psalm 50:1; Isaiah 40:10, 21-23; 59:16.

E. Monism & Dualism

Monism is the belief that God is one substance or principle in the universe. Pantheistic monism sees God as everything, and everything as God.

Biblical Response: Gen. 1:1, 2, 26; Ex. 34:5; John 1:1-3, 14;

Dualism is the concept that there are two distinct and irreducible principles or substances in the universe and transcendent from it, represented metaphysically as mind and matter, ethically as good and evil, and religiously as God and Satan.

Biblical Response: Ecclesiastes 3:14; Isaiah 40:18; 46:9; Romans 9:14-21; Colossians 1:16.

F. Pantheism

Pantheism espouses a non-rational worldview that *the world is God*—that is, all is God and God is all—nothing exists that is not God. In this belief system, existence is ultimate

reality and is beyond any principle of good and evil (i.e., amoral). [Denies the existence of a personal and transcendent God]

Biblical Response: Genesis 1:1-2; Isaiah 50:10-12; Romans 1:20-21; Hebrews 11:3.

G. Panentheism

This belief system maintains essentially *a world in God* and a dynamic view of God in which God is in the process of “becoming”, and is the basis for Process Theology, also known as Neo-classical Theism, or Naturalistic Theism.

Biblical Response: Ex. 3:14; Psalm 90:2; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17.

H. Theism

The short form of classical Judeo-Christian monotheism, Theism is the belief in *a world plus an infinite God*. This view maintains a clear distinction between the Creator (God) and the created universe or natural order (Gen. 1:1), known as *transcendence*. The theistic God is also a *personal God* (Gen. 3:8; 18:1-5; Ex. 3:14-15), Who is *immanent* in the world He has created (Gen. 1:2; 18:20-21).

III. The God of the Bible

Historic Christian Theism:

Christian Theism is the belief in one true God who has revealed Himself to humankind, who exists in nature as a Trinity (three equal but distinct, indivisible, Persons): *“that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; equal in every divine perfection and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.”*

[New Hampshire Confession of Faith – 1833]

A. The Existence of God

Our belief in the existence of the God of the Bible is based upon two fundamental criteria: the explicit revelatory statements about God in Scripture, and the congruity of what the Bible has revealed about God with what we perceive in the world as it is. Although the Bible presupposes (assumes) God’s existence, and in that sense no so-called empirical proof is required, yet there are logical, deductive arguments that traditionally have been used to support the existence of God. These are:

- the **cosmological** argument (cause & effect) - the existence of the universe (effect) demands a Creator (cause). Psalm 19; Heb. 3:4; Rom. 1:19-20.
- the **teleological** argument (design) - the nature and complexity (design) of the universe demands the existence of a Designer (God). Job 38-42; Psalm 94:9; Isa. 40.
- the **moral** (anthropological) argument - the personal nature of man and his sense of law (morality) implies the existence of a Lawgiver (God), Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15.

- the **ontological** argument – [relating to or based upon being or existence] the very idea of God, prevalent in virtually all cultures, presupposes the existence of God. [An *a priori* argument that assumes that if something can be conceived of, it must exist]

Ultimately, deductive arguments cannot prove the existence of God, and the degree to which the above arguments are rationally coherent varies with each. We believe that the cosmological and teleological arguments make the strongest case.

B. The Essence and Unity of God

Historically, terms like “*essence*” and “*nature*” are derived from Greek philosophical concepts. From a finite perspective it is impossible to define an infinite God. However, in humanly cognitive terms, the Bible states that “*God is spirit*” (John 4:24) as to essence or substance, i.e., He is invisible (immaterial). According to the frequent use of anthropomorphic [humanlike] descriptions in the Bible God is an infinite but personal Being, as to His nature (Ps. 90:2; Gen. 3:8; 18:1-5; Ex. 3:14-15).

C. The Trinity

1. Statement of the Doctrine [See Confessional Statements]

The traditional Christian definition of the doctrine of the Trinity is that *God is One in essence*, existing in *three Persons*, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Who are all three *co-existent, co-equal and co-eternal*. True Christian monotheism presupposes the unity of God in a trinity, or tri-unity, as the historic creeds attest. Although the Bible does not rationally explain the nature of the Trinity, there can be no doubt as to its presence in Scripture (Gen. 1:1-2, cf. Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:2; Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 5:1-4; 2 Cor. 13:14).

2. Ontological Trinity

In the history of the church there have been many attempts at clarifying the doctrine of the Trinity, and much of one’s definition derives from one’s perspective. The perspective of the *Ontological Trinity* is the **unity** of the Trinity (*one in three*) and examines the doctrine from the standpoint of the *nature* or *substance* of the Godhead. The issue of Ontological Trinity relates closely to the creedal formulations (particularly the 4th Century creeds) re: the *eternal generation* and *eternal procession* of the members of the Godhead, attempts of the church to defend against the Arian heresy³ of that era.

³ Arianism, named for its author, Arius (of Libya), was a Christian heresy of the 4th Century which essentially denied the full deity of Christ. In an effort to safeguard the absolute transcendence of God, Arius taught that God was not begotten and had no beginning, whereas the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, was begotten and therefore could not be God in the same sense as the Father. The Son was not generated out of the divine substance of the Father (i.e., did not exist from all eternity), but was created out of nothing by God. His “Sonship” derives from an adoptive relationship with the Father, not a natural one. Note: The beliefs held by the Jehovah’s Witnesses concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity are a modern form of Arian heresy.

<i>Apostolic Fathers</i>	<i>Apologists</i>	<i>Theologians</i>
Confusion over His Person Confusion over His Work	Confusion over His Person Confusion over His Work	Clarification of His Person
100 A.D.	150 A.D.	250 A.D. 430 A.D.

3. Economic Trinity

The perspective of the *Economic Trinity* is that of *relationship or function* of the members of the Godhead, where the focus is on **diversity** (*three in one*). At heart is the issue of administration within the Godhead (the function of each Person), particularly as it relates to redemptive history.

4. Trinity in the Old Testament

Although the Old Testament unequivocally maintains the unity of God (Deut. 6:4; Ex. 20:2-3), there is ample allowance in Old Testament Scriptures for a diversity in unity (i.e., Trinity):

- The use of Elohim, a plural name for deity, often with a singular verb form (Gen. 1,2)
- The use of plural pronouns (Gen. 1:26)
- The explicit mention of both God and Spirit (Gen. 1:2; 6:3)
- The reference to "Son" in Psalm 2:7 and 110:1
- The numerous references to "Angel of the Lord" (Gen. 31:11-13; 32:24-30; 48:15-16; Ex. 3:2-6; Judges 6:11-24).

5. Trinity in the New Testament

The New Testament amply attests not only to the *deity* of the Father, Son, and Spirit (**Father**, Mt. 6:26, 30, 32; 1 Cor. 8:6; **Son**, Jn. 1:1-4, 14; Phil. 2:5-11; Rev. 1:1-8; and **Holy Spirit**, Acts 5:1-4), but to all three being united into One (Mt. 28:19-20; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 5:8). In addition, there are many NT references to relationship between the three Persons of the Trinity: (Mt. 3:16-17; John 14:16; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Thinking About It

1. Contrast the *transcendence* of God with His *immanence*
2. Explain the **cosmological** argument (cause & effect) for the existence of God
3. Explain the **teleological** argument (design) for the existence of God
4. As to essence or substance, God is _____
5. Compare the *ontological* and the *economic* Trinity

IV. The Names of God

There are three principal names ascribed to God in the Old Testament:

- A. **El, Elohim** is the most common name for God in the Old Testament, and is the “generic” name for deity, used both for the true God and for the pagan gods of the nations surrounding Israel. (See Gen. 1:1 for first use of this name). The meaning of *Elohim* is obscure, but probably means “strong one”. The form of *Elohim* is plural, thus allowing for the Trinity, although it is used for individual Persons of the Trinity as well. אל
אלהים
- B. **Adonai** is the common term for “master” or “lord” and is used in a special sense relating to God as Master. It is also used of men who are masters over servants or slaves. *Adonai* is often used in conjunction with *Elohim* (Gen. 15:2). אדני
- C. **Jehovah “Yahweh”** is a unique name applied only to the True God. This name appears first at the Creation (Gen. 2:4), but its meaning is given later, in Exodus 3:13-14, “I am that I am”, in other words, the self-existent, eternal One. יהוה

Compound names of God:

Combinations of the principal names of God appear frequently in the Old Testament, of which the most common are *Jehovah Elohim* or *Adonai Elohim*.

Other compounds are formed in conjunction with the principal names of God, such as:

- **Jehovah-jireh**, “the LORD will provide” (Gen. 22:13-14)
- **Jehovah-rapha**, “the LORD who heals” (Ex. 15:26)
- **Jehovah-nissi**, “the LORD my banner” (Ex. 17:8-15)
- **Jehovah-shalom**, “the LORD our peace” (Judges 6:24)
- **Jehovah-tsidkenu**, “the LORD our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6)
- **Jehovah-shammah**, “the LORD is present” (Ezek. 48:35)

V. The Perfections (Attributes) of God

The discussion of the *attributes* of God does not imply that anything is *attributed* (added) to God, but rather is a discussion of His innate qualities or perfections (1 Pet. 2:9). God is infinite, and thus infinitely perfect in all that He is and does. Neither do we believe that a discussion of the attributes of God implies that they can be separated from each other and neatly categorized, nor that God’s attributes exist or operate independently. God is *love* (1 John 4:8), but He is also *light* (1 John 1:5). Neither attribute represents a definition of all that God is, nor is God more of one than the other, etc.

Theologian A. H. Strong defined the attributes of God as “*those distinctive characteristics of the divine nature that are inseparable from the idea of God and that constitute the basis and foundation for His diverse manifestations to His creatures.*”

