

Theology Proper

I. The Trinity

A. Nicene Creed

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds (aeons), God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. And he will come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Explanation

As we discussed in Theological Method, there is both a danger and value to creeds and thinking through what those who came before us wrestled through and the conclusions they came to. The danger in using creeds is to not think for ourselves. The danger in not using them is to be arrogant and think that we will come up with more faithful ways of thinking about Scripture than hundreds of those who came before us for hundreds of years. The value in the creeds is that they weren't just written by one man, like most other resources. Groups of pastors came together and wrestled together to sharpen each other and come to a unified understanding.

Don't get tripped up on some of the language of the creed. When it talks about the one holy catholic and apostolic church, it's not talking about the Roman Catholic church. It's not talking about the apostolic church that is known today. It is talking about the universal church, the body of Christ, all the believers who trust in Jesus and who are united by His blood, despite whatever denomination we are in. We don't concede the claims of the Roman Catholic Church that the Nicene Creed and early church fathers were in their heritage but not ours. Actually, we believe that these early leaders and creeds in the church were an expression of biblical Christianity, in whose line we are continuing in.

The Nicene Creed was written among other things to oppose Arianism, a view promoted by a man named Arius that denied the full deity of Jesus. Arianism claimed that Jesus was a created being. The Nicene Creed thus brought many of the pastors from around the world at that time together to formulate their teaching on God, and how to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity. It is important to note that the Nicene Creed didn't invent the doctrine of the Trinity, but merely formulated how to articulate what believers already had been believing for centuries. In essence what it is protecting is that there are three persons of the Godhood who all share the same divine nature or essence, while still being distinctly One God together.

B. The Divine Nature

i. The Ontological Trinity

The Ontological Trinity describes the relationships in the Trinity **before or outside** of creation. There is much mystery in the Ontological Trinity that is beyond our comprehension and that God hasn't revealed to us. Not much more can be said other than that the names Father, Son, and Spirit represent something about who the three persons of the Trinity are. Thus the creeds don't really go further than affirming that the Father eternally begets the Son, and that the Spirit proceeds from the Father (through the Son). All three members of the Trinity are equally God.

But although we don't understand too much about the mysteries of the Trinity and their relationship outside of Creation, it is notable that God has forever existed in Trinity, and that makes God by nature a relational and loving God. God is love. In other monotheistic religions, Allah, or the God of Judaism, there are no relationships outside of creation. In Judaism and Islam before creation there was no possibility for loving another person. But our Triune God is love by nature, and even apart from creation is personal.

ii. The Economic Trinity

The Economic Trinity describes the roles of the members of the Trinity **in** creation. The Son submitted to the Father in Creation and came to do the Father's will. The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Rom. 8:9-10) who the Father sent (John 14:26). Broadly speaking, the Father is the Creator and providential Governor of creation, Jesus is the Son and Word of God who came to make the Father known and accomplish God's plan of redemption by dying as a man for sinners, and the Spirit empowers what God does, from creation (Gen. 1:2) to recreation (John 3:5; Titus 3:5-6). None of the members of the Godhood act apart from one another, and yet they do have different roles in creation.

One of the most majestic texts that unpack the roles in the Trinity describes how everything will be subjected to Christ so that He can then give it all back over to His Father so that God may be all in all. It shows us how the glorification of the Son leads to the glorification of the Father. But the Son's being subject to the Father is in creation, and doesn't relate to their relationship in eternity past, but in God's glorious plan of salvation. -

1 Corinthians 15:21-25

For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

C. Table Discussion: Why do you think it's important to get the Trinity right? How is understanding the Trinity practical in our daily lives?

II. The Godness of God - The Incommunicable Attributes

We want to unpack a Big God theology. Our God is bigger than we can imagine. I can guarantee, our view of God isn't big enough. We want to come to a fuller understanding of Him so that our trust, love, awe, and worship of Him will grow even greater.

- A. Table Discussion: What aspects of God's nature did you discover in Exodus 3?
- B. One of the clearest texts that explain God's nature is Exodus 3.

Here God revealed His name and nature to Moses so that Moses could call the people of Israel to trust and obey their God.

God's holiness/transcendence - We can't come near to God because He is holy, even the ground near where the representative of Yahweh came was "Holy ground."

God is invisible/spirit - The angel of Yahweh came to represent Yahweh, so that clearly implies that Yahweh Himself cannot be seen. Other verses of course state this explicitly.

God's immanence - Yet the fact that the angel/representative of Yahweh came shows that God is near. He came and talked to Moses, He revealed Himself.

God is historical/particular - The God of the Bible is a particular God who has revealed Himself in a particular way in history, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

God is covenantal - Yahweh is God's covenant name. He made a covenant with Abraham and He is a relational God that formed a people for Himself and He will be faithful to them.

God's compassion - "I have seen the affliction of my people." God cares for His people and will act on their behalf. God in His nature is a saving God who is for His people.

Trinity - We see in this text that the angel of Yahweh is distinct from Yahweh, and yet is Yahweh. Although this isn't a fully developed expression of the Trinity, we definitely see the truth behind the Trinity in this text.

God's aseity - "I am who I am." When God revealed Himself in this pivotal time to save His people, He wanted them to

C. Transcendence

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Romans 11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

God is beyond our comprehension and beyond our reach. If it's wasn't for God's revelation of Himself, we would never know anything about Him. But God chose not only to reveal Himself, but to come to us and become one of us.

D. Aseity/Creator

Exodus 3:14

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

John 5:26

For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself..

Acts 17:24-31

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Hebrews 1:3

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

God is the only self-existent self-dependent being in the universe. Everything else is created and dependent on God for its very existence. He is who He is. Everything in the universe has a cause except God. He is His own cause. Everything in the universe falls into two categories: God, and not-God. God is the Creator, sustainer of everything, and everything owes it's very existence to Him. God is never needy (Ps. 50:12).

E. Invisible/spirit

John 4:24

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

1 Timothy 6:16

...who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Exodus 33:20

But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”

Deuteronomy 4:12

Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form— only a voice.

God in His essential nature is an invisible spirit. That mean He doesn't have a body of any kind. This is related to the quality below that God is omni-present. He is everywhere, or put another way, outside of His creation.

But the fact that God is an invisible Spirit doesn't mean that He can't 'appear' to people. These manifestations of God are called *theophanies* and they occur throughout Scripture. But these *theophanies* are God reaching His hand into our world so to speak and revealing something of Himself without His essential nature being visible. He can reveal something of His glory without His divine person being visible.

Of course, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity is the exception to this. In Jesus, God took on human flesh. Even in the Old Testament as we have seen, the second person of the Trinity is the messenger (angel) of Yahweh who represents Him and makes God visible.

Divine simplicity is a doctrine that teaches that God is not made up of parts, He is not material. You can't take anything away from God and He still be God. He is His attributes, His attributes are not incidental to who He is. When the Son is eternally begotten from the Father He doesn't take away from what the Father is, and the Son is begotten in such a way that He is of the same essence as the Father.

- F. Table Discussion: What are practical implications of God's transcendence, aseity, and being an invisible spirit and how should they affect us in our daily lives?
- G. Omni-presence

Psalms 139:7-10

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.

Jeremiah 23:23-24

"Am I a God who is near," declares the Lord, "And not a God far off? "Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the Lord. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the Lord."

1 Kings 8:27

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!"

God is everywhere at once. This of course implies that He is outside of His creation, not bound by the space that He Himself created. Of course that implies that God Himself doesn't have a body, in His essence. When God did appear in the Old Testament, He reached into His creation to interact with us, but isn't in Himself limited by a body or space. He is everywhere at once. So that implies that when Scripture talks about the 'arm' or 'hand' of God, that these are anthropomorphisms, ways a communicated in a way that we can understand without it being a fully literal statement.

Josh's conviction: God's omni-presence implies that He is omni-temporal, or timeless. This is because time and space are related and relative to one another. Modern physics has proven that at certain speeds space itself warps, and at certain masses, time dilates. We call this the time-space continuum. Put another way, time is the 4th dimension. As finite creations, we can only be in one space at a time. We can be in class, and we can be at home, but not at the same time. We are always at a certain place in a certain time. We are always limited to being at a certain place in time-space. But not God. He created time-space. He exists outside of it. He is Creator, not creation. Verses confirm that God doesn't experience time like we do. -

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Psalms 90:2, 4

Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night.

2 Peter 3:8

But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

H. Impassibility/immutability

Numbers 23:19

"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

Malachi 3:6

"For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed."

1 Samuel 15:29

"Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind."

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

James 1:13, 17

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Psalms 16:11

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

God is unchanging. Nothing we do can change Him or take away from who He is. God is not needy, He is ultimately happy because everything is going according to His plan.

While it is true that Scripture communicates that God changes His mind, or is saddened about different events, given that God is timeless and cannot suffer at the hands of His creation, it is best to think of these statements as anthropopathisms (God communicating to us using accommodating language, like saying that ‘hand of God.’) (Gen. 6:6). This isn’t to say that these verses don’t communicate God is against sin, but you can’t go too far and believe that God is surprised and responding to His creation who foiled His plan. Rather, the verses that talk about God being sorry or repenting about doing something are seeking to communicate in clear human language how God is opposed to something and dislikes it.

I. Omniscient

Hebrews 4:13

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Proverbs 15:3

The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.

Psalms 139:1-6

For the choir director. A Psalm of David. O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

Romans 11:33-34

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?

God knows everything. This is staggering to think about in light of everything there is to know! He knows the number of hairs on the head of every human being (Matt. 10:30). He knows our thoughts (Ps. 139:2). He knows the future and the past (Isa. 46:9-10). And the list goes on. He literally sees and knows everything (Prov. 15:3; 1 John 3:20).

J. Omnipotent/Sovereign

Genesis 17:1

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.”

Revelation 1:8; 4:8

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”

Ephesians 1:11

...also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will...

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Proverbs 16:33

The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord.

Lamentations 3:37-38

Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?

Job 42:2

"I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted."

Isaiah 45:7; 46:10

The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'...

Acts 2:23; 4:27-28

...this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

God is all powerful and in complete control over every aspect of creation. This extends from large events (Amos 3:6), to small events (Matt. 10:29). God is even sovereign over the human heart (Ex. 14:17-18; Eph. 2:5-9). This does not mean that God ever coerces someone to choose something apart from what they want, but rather that God providentially works out everything so that what we want is what He has planned. The fact that God is omniscient and the fact that He is omnipotent ultimately guarantees that He is completely sovereign. If God knows what is going to happen, and is able to change it, and chooses not to, that ultimately is His sovereign choice. There is no way around this and Scripture actually embraces this reality.

There literally is no such thing as chance in the world since God determines every dice roll or seemingly unpredictable event (Prov. 16:33). We see all throughout Scripture how God meticulously plans out incredibly detailed sequences of events of hundreds and thousands of years, from small to large, to accomplish His plan (Gen. 37:15; Ruth 2:3).

This reality that God is absolutely sovereign doesn't negate the fact that in some mysterious way, God also desires for all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and also that men have wills that must choose to believe in Him or reject Him (John 3:18-19). In fact, the fact that God has chosen men to salvation only makes Paul work all the harder that the elect may be saved (2 Tim. 2:10).

- K. Table Discussion: What are practical implications of God's omni-presence, immutability, omniscience, and sovereignty and how should they affect us in our daily lives?

III. The Imitation of God - The Communicable Attributes (Eph. 5:1)

A. Holy

Isaiah 6:1-5

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

B. Love

1 John 4:8, 16

The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

C. Faithful/Truthful/Merciful/Gracious

Exodus 34:6-7

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; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

D. Just/Righteous

Deuteronomy 32:4

"The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He."

Romans 12:19-20

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

E. Patient/Longsuffering

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Nahum 1:3

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

F. Good/Kind

Psalms 34:8

O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

Psalms 136:1

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

G. Jealous/Angry

Nahum 1:2

A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies.

Psalms 7:11

God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day.

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...

H. Immanent/Present

Psalms 145:18

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

I. Psalm 145 is a great song about the character of God!

IV. Small Group Discussion Questions

- Walk through the theological lessons you each found in Exodus 3.
- How did Moses intend for the truths in this chapter about God to affect the original Israelites who heard it?
- How should an understanding of God's aseity (the fact that God is self-sufficient and self-existent) affect us in a practical way in our daily lives? In what situations do we need to remember this truth about God?