

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY - A SUMMARY OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

The Existence of God

Scriptural proof for the existence of God.

The Christian accepts God's existence by faith. But this faith is not blind faith but faith based on reliable information, evidence primarily in Scripture as the inspired Word of God and secondarily, both in the natural world and in the heart of man. Scripture proof doesn't come in the form of explicit declaration, much less logical argument. - the Bible presupposes the existence of God. Gen 1.1. Heb 11.6. John 7.17. Hosea 6.3. 1 Cor 1.20,21. Psalm 14.1.

The so-called rational proofs for the existence of God.

1. The Ontological argument - The idea of a perfect being.
2. The Cosmological argument - The first cause.
3. The Teleological argument. - The argument from design.
4. The Transcendental argument - Logic, morals and scientific laws ultimately presuppose a mind and lawgiver, a supreme being.
5. The Historical argument. - A universal sense of the divine exists in all tribes and peoples.

The Knowability of God

God incomprehensible but yet knowable.

The Christian church confesses on the one hand that God is the incomprehensible One, but also, that He can be known and that knowledge of Him is essential for salvation. Psalm 145.3, Isa 40.18 and John 17.3. 1 John 5.20. Reformed theology holds that God can be known, but it is impossible for man to have exhaustive, perfect knowledge of Him. True knowledge of God can only come from the divine self-revelation to the man who accepts it by faith.

Self-revelation the prerequisite of all knowledge of God.

God communicates knowledge of Himself to man. Man can know God only so far as God actively makes Himself known. God can only become an object of study for man so far as man reflects on what is given by revelation. There is an **Innate** (unlearned) and **Acquired** (studied) knowledge of God. There is **General** (the nature round about us, human consciousness and the providential government of the world) and **Special** (the Bible) revelation. Ps 19.1,2 Acts 14.17 Rom 1.19,20 1 Kings 17.13 Ps 103.7 John 1.18 Heb 1.1,2

Relation of the Being and Attributes of God

The Being of God.

John 4.24 "God is Spirit" Exodus 3.14 "I AM that I AM". The essence of God is incomprehensible but all knowledge of it is not to be excluded. There is Unity, Simplicity, Spirituality, Transcendence, Pure thought, Absolute Self Existence, Love, Personality and Majestic Holiness.

The possibility of knowing the Being of God.

Knowing is different to comprehending. God is hidden in darkness, apart from revealing Himself in a measure. The finite cannot comprehend the Infinite. Apart from God's attributes we have no knowledge of the Being of God. God can be known through relationship with man in His revelations, and supremely in Jesus Christ.

The Being of God revealed in His attributes.

God and His attributes are one, they are not parts or additions. The attributes are qualities that inhere in the Being of God. God's perfections are God as He has revealed Himself. They are essential qualities of God each one revealing some aspect of the Being of God.

The Names of God

The names of God in general.

The Bible gives several names of God as well as speaking of the name of God in the singular as an expression of His nature. The name of God is His self-revelation split into many names expressing the many-sided Being of God. They are anthropomorphic in condescension.

The Old Testament names.

1. **EI** - God - being lord strong and mighty. **Elohim** - Smitten with fear pointing to the strong and mighty One of creation. Plural indicating fullness of power. **Elyon** - The high and exalted One. 2. **Adonai** - The almighty ruler.
3. **Shaddai** and **Ei-Shaddai** - All powerful in the work of grace.
4. **Yahweh** - Tetragrammaton. "I AM" The self-existent One. **Yahweh Tsebhaoth** - LORD of hosts (angels).

The New Testament names.

1. **Theos** - Greek equivalent for no. 1 above (may be used of heathen gods). **Pantokrator** / **Theos Pantokrator** for Shaddai/ Ei-Shaddai.
2. **Kurios** - Adonai substituted for Yahweh. Used not only of God but Christ.
3. **Pater** - Father. The special relation the first person of the Trinity stands to Christ as the Son of God or the ethical relation to all believers.

The Attributes of God in General.

Attributes is not an ideal term as it implies adding or assigning. Properties, Perfections or Virtues/ Excellences is better. Def. The perfections which are predicated of the Divine Being in scripture, or are visibly exercised by Him in His works of creation, providence and redemption. The knowledge of the attributes is to be found in God's revealing in scripture, not starting from Man.

The Incommunicable Attributes

The Self-Existence of God.

Having the ground of His existence in Himself. God is not only independent in His Being, but is independent in all else: virtues, decrees, works and so on.

The Immutability of God.

Being devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections and in His purposes and promises. Above all becoming, free from all accession, diminution, growth or decay. Not immobility.

The Infinity of God.

Being free from all limitations in His being or attributes. In itself **Absolute Perfection**. In relation to time, **Eternal**. In relation to space, **Immense**.

The Unity of God.

Singular Unity: Stresses both the oneness and the unicity of God, He is numerically one and therefore He is unique. **Simple Unity**: Inner qualitative unity. Not composite or susceptible of division in any sense of the word.

The Communicable Attributes

The Spirituality of God.

John 4.24. Not merely God is a spirit, but that He is Spirit. God has a substantial Being distinct from the world, immaterial, invisible, and without composition or extension. He is a self-conscious and self-determining Being with no passions or material body and cannot be discerned by the bodily senses.

Intellectual attributes.

Knowledge: He, in an entirely unique manner, knows Himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal and most simple act. **Wisdom**: He applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most.

Moral attributes.

1. **Goodness**: In Himself and to His creatures. **Love**: Moved to self-communication. **Grace**: Unmerited favour of God to those who have forfeited it. **Mercy**: Shown to those who are in misery or distress. **Longsuffering**: Bearing with the forward and evil in spite of their continued disobedience. **2. Holiness**: Pure and set apart. **3. Righteousness**: Maintaining holy adherence to His Law.

Attributes of Sovereignty.

God has absolute authority. His will is the cause of all things and He upholds all things with His almighty power, and determines the ends which they are destined to serve. **Will**: Twofold - Decretive and Preceptive. God's will is free, can be necessary and/or permissive without implying pleasure in allowing sin. **Power**: He is the absolute and highest causality. To do all He could will as well as all He does will.

The Holy Trinity

God as Trinity in unity.

God is tri-personal as opposed to uni-personal like man. a. There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence. b. In this one Divine Being there are three Persons of individual subsistences, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. c. The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons. d. The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order. e. There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished. f. The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man. While attempts have been made to suggest some analogies, they are all defective as they can only take their smiles from the natural not the spiritual.

The three Persons.

The Father or first Person of the Trinity - The name describes His work of creation, the theocratic relation to Israel, the ethical relation to His spiritual children and, quite separately, His relation to the second Person. He is not begotten but generates the Son and spirates the Holy Spirit. He is particularly ascribed the work of redemption (including representing the Trinity in the counsel of redemption), creation and providence. **The Son** or second Person of the Trinity - 'Son of God' from a preincarnation standpoint and indicative of the deity of Christ. He is eternally (timeless 'eternal present') act) begotten of the Father ('Elation'), and shares with the Father in the spiration of the Spirit. Being begotten is a generation of the personal subsistence rather than of the divine essence of the Son. It is spiritual and not subject to division or change. He is a Surety, Mediator and Executor of the redemption plan. He is a fully divine person. **The Holy Spirit** or third person of the Trinity - It is the Holy Spirit that takes up His abode in the hearts of believers, that separates them unto God, and that cleanses them from sin. Scripture represents Him as a person. He is consubstantial and proceeds both from the Father and Son ('spiration'). He is a fully divine person. He generates life, applies and completes redemption, inspires scripture, forms and guides the Church.

For further information see Louis Berkhof's Systematic Theology