

CHAPTER XI

THE PERSONAL BEING OF GOD

A. INTRODUCTION

1. "Ontology" involves the study of "being" or "existence," though here we are focusing on "personal existence" and its character in the personal existence of God. As being has its root in the eternal and original, eternal being of God, so man's derived being comes from that same source. Therefore, to properly understand personal human being, one must first understand the only personal God. Secular, humanistic, philosophic contemplation of personal being tends to be grounded upon man, that is subjective speculation, inward contemplation as to what is meant when I declare, "I am." Of course such a focus purposely puts aside the priority of being as originating in God. In this study, personal being, as grounded in the being of God, is defined according to objective revelation, the Great Being's self-revelation.
2. God is a particular being with self-consciousness, self-determination, self-sufficiency, and self-manifestation, which entities will be considered in more detail in Chapter XII titled, "The Personality of God." Further, He is distinguished as the only person with existence that is underived, without origin. All other being is derived from the eternal, independent, self-sustaining being of God, either directly or indirectly. Hence, His personal name is fittingly, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14). In God being personal, it must be stressed that human apprehension of being a person is not to be foisted in any way upon the truth of God being a person. His attribute of being personal is known solely by self-revelation or Being-revelation. Undoubtedly, biblical revelation of God is in personal terms.
3. The God of the Bible is distinctively personal. Erickson points out that there is no personal deity in a number of Eastern religions. He quotes G. T. Manley on *Hinduism*, who writes:

In Hinduism, reality is *Brahma*, the whole, of which we are individual parts or *Atman*. One does not relate to reality by turning outward, as to an individual person. One rather withdraws, inward, through a process of contemplation. The aim of this process is to lose one's own individual identity and self-consciousness, to be in effect absorbed into the whole. *Nirvana* is the stage at which all individual striving ceases, and one becomes simply at rest. The biblical view is quite different. Here God is personal. He is an individual being, with self-consciousness and will, capable of feeling, choosing, and having a reciprocal relationship with other personal and social beings."¹

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 268-9.

B. GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT

1. Introduction. The gods of mankind originate or come into being, whether by material construction or mental conception. "But where are your gods which you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you In the time of your trouble; for according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah" (Jer. 2:28; cf. 16:20). By way of contrast, the eternal, self-existent God of the Bible has always existed.
 - a. Idols of wood and stone are carved, hewn, and manufactured. Hence, they are reliant upon an originator or maker. Idols of the intellect are likewise conceived by the mind, then modified by mental chiseling, and ultimately shelved or exchanged or remodeled as self-centered circumstances dictate. So they are reliant upon a human creator. Therefore, it logically follows that the originator ought to be more revered than that which he originates. These idols then were never worthy of reverence to begin with; their existence is strictly limited to human contrivance. Hence such idolatry often turns out to self-worship by proxy.
 - b. But someone will protest, "If you necessarily claim a Creator for the creation, then where did the Creator or the God of the Bible come from?" To this we first reply, "Yes, God is self-existent and has always been; he never came into existence." Second, we then enquire, "Now tell us about where matter has come from, its origin." If we are told, "Matter just came into being," then we make further enquiry about the nature of the originating source. To postulate an endless chain of coming into being is not satisfactory; it suggests a de facto realm of the eternal. But if we are told, and this is a much more likely response, "Matter has always existed," then we answer, "Our preference is to believe in an eternal, personal, self-existent God, rather than eternal, impersonal, self-existent matter." Strong makes the same point as follows: "Self-existence is certainly incomprehensible to us, yet a self-existent person is no greater mystery than a self-existent thing, such as Herbert Spencer supposes the universe to be; indeed it is not so great a mystery, for it is easier to derive matter from mind than to derive mind from matter."²
2. The meaning of God's self-existence.
 - a. God has aseity or underived existence. That is, He is without origin and as a consequence is absolutely independent. He has not known causation, so that He is not answerable to anyone or dependent upon anything. He is perfectly self-reliant. He is eternally grounded upon Himself and nothing else.

² Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 257.

- (1) In II Corinthians 9:8 we are told, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, that [He] always having [self-]sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." The Greek compound here, *αὐτάρκεια*, *autarkeia*, stresses "self-sufficiency" (cf. I Tim. 6:6). Likewise consider John 5:26 where "the Father has life in Himself." "1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Ps. 90:1-2; cf. Ps. 36:9; Eph. 1:5).
- (2) It is not correct to say that God is self-originating or His own cause. In His essence He has not in any sense been caused, even in any supposed continuous sense. However, it would be more correct to say that He is self-sustaining, self-perpetuating.
- (3) God's self-existence is fully satisfactory to Himself. Hence, He is self-sufficient, self-satisfied, and all-sufficient. This means that He is never lonely, needful, or unfulfilled, especially when His triunity is taken into consideration. God has a right self-image and is rightly self-centered.

b. By way of illustration, Arthur Pink writes:

'In the beginning, God' (Gen. 1:1). There was a time, if 'time' it could be called, when . . . there was nothing, no one, but God; and *that*, not for a day, a year, or an age, but 'from everlasting.' During a past eternity, God was alone; self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied; in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been necessary to Him in any way, they also had been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added nothing to God essentially.³

c. God's self-existence is variously manifest in

- (1) His *name*. "13 Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?' 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.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations'''" (Exod. 3:13-15; 6:6-8).

³ Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 9.

- (2) His *thought*. “³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?” (Rom. 11:33-34).
 - (3) His *will*. “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’” (Rom. 9:19; cf. Dan. 4:35).
 - (4) His *counsel*. “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation” (Ps. 33:11).
3. The practical importance of God’s self-existence. The significance here concerns the contrast with derived human existence, that is man’s dependency in the light of God’s independency.
- a. God does not lack satisfaction in relationships as does uneasy man.
 - (1) While God is solitary and essentially one, yet within the triunity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, there is perfect personal fellowship. “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” (John 1:18; cf. 3:35; 14:16-17, 26). Consequently, God did not create man because of lack in His eternal existence, but rather so that His glory might be displayed. “Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (I Pet. 4:11; cf. John 15:8; Rom. 15:5-6). Thus Jonathan Edwards explains in his *The End For Which God Created The World* that, “the great end of God’s works, which is so variously expressed in Scripture, is indeed but ONE; and this *one* end is most properly and comprehensively called, THE GLORY OF GOD.”⁴
 - (2) However, man is dependent since he has a ground of existence outside of himself, namely the eternal God of all creation. Hence, man is unfulfilled unless he yields in humble submission to this relationship. This means that the shoulder of the eternal God is the only place for man to find stable support and lasting acceptance. “¹⁵ For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’ (Isa. 57:15). Any other shoulder has weakness in that it also is dependent as a creature. By way of

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I, p. 119.

illustration, consider Tozer's call for reassessment of our current understanding of the self-sufficient God:

Almighty God, just because He is almighty, needs no support. The picture of a nervous, ingratiating God fawning over men to win their favor is not a pleasant one; yet if we look at the popular conception of God that is precisely what we see. Twentieth-century Christianity has put God on charity. So lofty is our opinion of ourselves that we find it quite easy, not to say enjoyable, to believe that we are necessary to God. . . . Too many missionary appeals are based upon this fancied frustration of Almighty God. An effective speaker can easily excite pity in his hearers, not only for the heathen but for the God who has tried so hard and so long to save them and has failed for want of support. I fear that thousands of young persons enter Christian service from no higher motive than to help deliver God from the embarrassing situation His love has gotten Him into and His limited abilities seem unable to get Him out of. . . . Let us not imagine that the truth of the divine self-sufficiency will paralyze Christian activity. . . . For the blessed news is that the God who needs no one has in sovereign condescension stooped to work by and in and through His obedient children.⁵

C. GOD IS SPIRITUAL

1. Introduction. Consider the opposite terms "spirit" and "matter" as they are generally used, and then attempt to define their distinctive nature.
 - a. Matter is material that has mass, that coheres in occupying space, that is physical and subject to sensual comprehension. Matter is solid reality that has uniform properties and is called substance.
 - b. Spirit, especially with regard to God, yet distinct from wind, is immaterial living being, intelligent power that is incorporeal, invisible to material perception. There is a danger here that related terms will distort true definition. The most common analogies are those of "wind" and "breath," which terms, although descriptive, are not identical with the Spirit of God. The primary biblical words for spirit are רִיחַ, ruach, Hebrew, and, πνεῦμα, pneuma, Greek.
 - c. Charles Hodge comments: "It is impossible, therefore, to overestimate the importance of the truth contained in the simple proposition, God is a Spirit [John 4:24]. . . . None of the properties of matter can be predicated of Him. He is not extended or divisible, or compounded, or visible, or tangible. He has neither bulk nor form."⁶

⁵ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pp. 40-1, 43.

⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I, pp. 378-9.

2. God is essentially, distinctively, transcendently spirit.
 - a. God is essentially spirit, that is, "God is spirit," πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, pneuma ho theos (John 4:24), NASB, NKJV, NIV, ESV, and not, "God is a Spirit" KJV.
 - (1) Since "pneuma" is in the emphatic position and without the definite article, so Westcott concludes, supported by Hendriksen and Morris, that, "the nature and not the personality of God is described."⁷ The Apostle John makes similar inferences in John 1:18; 5:37; I John 4:12.
 - (2) Westcott also suggests that John's understanding of God as spirit is derived from Isaiah 31:3a.⁸ "Now the Egyptians are men and not God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit." Note the parallelism in this verse where Jehovah is described as "spirit" or "ruach," Hebrew, in contrast with the flesh of the Egyptians and their horses.
 - b. God is distinctively spirit, being eternal and underived. Hence, He is literally "the Father of the spirits" (Heb. 12:9), the source of man as a spiritual being.
 - (1) The spirituality of God is not merely a character trait, but a description of His unique, essential being, which is yet reflected. Charnock explains that, "God is a most spiritual spirit, more spiritual than all angels, all souls. . . . As he exceeds all in the nature of being, so he exceeds all in the nature of spirit."⁹
 - (2) God is pure spirit, having no necessary connection with matter,¹⁰ or contamination or limitation. There are finite spirit beings who are good. "The angel replied to me, 'These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth'" (Zech. 6:5; cf. Heb. 1:13-14). There are also finite spirit beings who are bad. "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Tim. 4:1; cf. Mark 1:27). Yet only God is most pure, holy spirit, essentially and incomparably.
 - (3) While God is variously described to finite man in anthropomorphic terms, yet He remains pure spirit without in reality being composed of material

⁷ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 73. Also William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, p. 168; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 271-2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹ Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, I, p. 263.

¹⁰ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 149-50.

parts or organs.¹¹ His essence as spirit has no bodily form, while in the person of the Son, as theophany (Gen. 32:24-30); Josh. 5:13-15) or incarnation (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-8), He is clothed in bodily form.

- c. God is transcendently spirit, “the blessed and only Sovereign, . . . who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; who no man has seen or can see” (I Tim. 6:15-16; cf. Job 37:22-23). To worship Him “in spirit and truth” is that which alone is fitting for His person.

Thou art, O God! Spirit pure,
 Invisible to mortal eyes;
 The immortal, and the eternal King,
 The great, the good, the only wise.
 My soul, thy purest homage pay,
 In truth and spirit Him adore;
 More shall this please than sacrifice,
 Than outward forms delight Him more.

3. The practical importance of the spirituality of God.

- a. The communication of spiritual life to man. Although the union of innocent Adam with God was one of spiritual harmony and mutual enjoyment, sin introduced a disconnect that only God could remedy. The line of communication was scrambled on account of corruption.

(1) While man is composed of both material and immaterial parts, yet the Bible declares that his immaterial/soulish/spiritual core is most fundamental to his being. “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26; cf. Gen. 2:7; Matt. 10:28; II Cor. 4:16; 5:1-8; II Pet. 1:13-15).

(a) Material man is made “of the dust from the ground” (Gen. 2:7a), and is designated as an “earthly vessel” (II Cor. 5:1). However, the fall has rendered this body of flesh as polluted and corrupt. “Now I say this, brethren, that [sinful] flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (I Cor. 15:50, 53).

(b) Immaterial man is derived from the breath of God after His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7). Hence, at his core, man originates from the spiritual life of God, and as such was, in his innocence, a spiritual being in

¹¹ James Petigrew Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, pp. 63-4.

fellowship with God (Gen. 3:8-9). However, the invisible, spiritual “inner man” (Eph. 3:16), may be divided into two further parts, namely “spirit and soul” (I Thess. 5:23; cf. Heb. 4:12). Certainly they are closely related to each other.

- 1) The soul of a man is that distinctive, superior, complex, self-conscious format of his immaterial being, that is in advance of the simple format of animals. According to Leviticus 24:18, an animal has a distinct soul, *nephesh*, Hebrew, which the NASB translates as “life.”
 - 2) The spirit of a man, united with his soul, is that distinguishing “God-conscious power that elevates the human personality so that it might commune with God. Consider Shedd’s further explanation.¹²
 - (c) This trichotomous, three-fold partition of man, namely into “body, soul, and spirit,” contrasts with the proposed dichotomous partition of “body and soul.” While “spirit” and “soul” are at times used interchangeably (Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9), yet an intentional distinction seems clear in I Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12.
 - (d) But can fallen man yet retain an active spirit? Yes, in that his spirit is dead to God along with his body and soul, but not extinct. When man’s spirit is made alive to God through Christ, “the last “Adam . . . a life-giving spirit” (I Cor. 15:45), then he may truly be described as “spiritual” (I Cor. 2:15; Gal. 6:1).
- (2) The significance of the spiritual nature of man.
- (a) It demands the rejection of the claim of the atheist, humanist, and Marxist-socialist, that man is solely of random, material and molecular composition, sans any spiritual or soulish component. Of course such a viewpoint wholly does away with religion in general, but especially Christianity.
 - (b) It demands the rejection of the abortionist’s claim that the unborn child is merely fetal tissue, especially since Scripture declares there is life in the unborn. “⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. . . .

¹² William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, II, pp. 656-8.

⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.” (Luke 1:41, 44; cf. Ps. 22:9).

- (c) It demands the rejection of the behaviourist’s somewhat mechanistic claim that man may be conditioned to respond after the manner of Pavlov’s dog. Rather man dwells in a world that has spiritual influences, having moral qualities, that have originated with either God or Satan; his behavior is effected by influence and direction in these realms, not social engineering.
- (d) It demands the rejection of the evolutionist’s claim which would require that matter gradually attained a spiritual type of dimension or awareness or influence that nevertheless is sourced in matter. Rather the priority of the spirituality of God, in it being foundational as an essential attribute, must take precedence concerning any involvement with the material world.
- (e) It demands the proper acceptance of man’s nobility in relation to other animals, and his only hope of spiritual fulfillment when reconciled to God through Christ. ¹⁹ God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:19-21).

b. The regulation of spiritual worship by man.

- (1) From the very birth of the nation of Israel, God prohibited the worship of Himself by means of material representation. ³ You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Ex. 20:3-6; cf. Deut. 5:7-10). Idolatry constituted man’s arrogant attempt to finitely portray the infinite God, with only degrading and perverted results.
 - (a) A modern, but conservative, Jewish commentary declares concerning Exodus 20:4: “Judaism alone, from the very beginning, taught that

God was a Spirit; and made it an unpardonable sin to worship God under any external form that human hands can fashion."¹³

- (b) Calvin comments concerning the Second Commandment: "God's glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him."¹⁴ Again he declares: "He [God] wholly calls us back and withdraws us from petty carnal observances, which our stupid minds, crassly conceiving of God, are wont to devise. And then he makes us conform to his lawful worship, that is a spiritual worship established by himself. . . . [He] restrains our license from daring to subject God, who is incomprehensible, to our sense perceptions, or to represent him by any form."¹⁵
- (2) The woman at the well, in conversing with Jesus, discovered that there are significant consequences derived from comprehension of the spirituality of God. She responded: "²⁰ 'Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' ²¹ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'" (John 4:20-24).
- (a) Spiritual worship is not geographic, material or formal, vs. 20-21.
 - 1) J. I. Packer explains: "The true condition of acceptable worship is not that your feet should be standing in either Jerusalem or Samaria, or anywhere else for that matter, but that your heart should be responsive to His revelation."¹⁶
 - 2) Attempts by man to stimulate a "worshipful atmosphere" by physical means such as lighting, audio effects, drapery, metal or wooden furniture, vestments, bodily movements, architecture, etc., are to be repudiated. Indeed they become sophisticated

¹³ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch And Haftorahs*, p. 295.

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, XI, 1

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, VIII, 17.

¹⁶ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 109.

manifestations of idolatry. Packer further comments concerning illustration.

Whatever we may think of religious art from a cultural standpoint, we should not look to pictures of God to show us His glory and move us to worship; for His glory is precisely what such pictures can never show us.¹⁷

- (b) Spiritual worship is based upon revealed truth, not mere tradition, sentiment, sensuality, personal preference or ingenuity, v. 22.
- 1) Jesus plainly tells the woman at Jacob's well that the Samaritans were ignorant and in error concerning their claims with regard to Mt. Gerazim. "[The] salvation is from the Jews," means that the Hebrew Scriptures alone, endowed to Israel, are the true revelation of Messianic salvation. ¹⁹ He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. ²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!" (Ps. 147:19-20; Isa. 2:3; Rom. 3:1-2; 9:3-5).
 - 2) Similarly in vs. 23-24, true worship is to be, "in spirit and *truth* [emphasis added]." We are only to worship the true God revealed by propositional statements in the Bible, not subjective speculation, whose nature being spirit, demands corresponding spiritual esteem and adoration. The truth stimulates the spiritual Christian; so he discovers that "the word [λόγος, logos] of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12).
- (c) Spiritual worship, inaugurated by Jesus Christ, is a new and superior mode when compared with the worship of Israel in the Old Testament, v. 23.
- 1) It is new covenant, gospel centered, heavenly worship. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3; cf. Acts 2:42).
 - 2) It is worship that has done away with former carnal/racial distinctions through the one body of Christ. "And behold, the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 41..

veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split" (Matt. 27:51; Eph. 2:11-18).

- 3) It is worship that is animated by God's outpoured Holy Spirit. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (II Cor. 13:14; cf. I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4).

- 4) By way of illustration, Charnock states that,

the whole [old] economy consisted in sensible and material things which only touched the flesh; it is called 'the letter,' and the 'oldness of the letter' (Rom. 7:6). . . . The gospel hath an efficacious spirit attending it, strongly working upon the mind and will, and molding the soul into a spiritual frame for God.¹⁸

- (d) Spiritual worship is, according to God's terms, especially the demands of His spiritual being, and not those of human determination, v. 24.

- 1) Man may devise forms of worship such as "fig leaves" (Gen. 3:7), "the fruit of the ground" (Gen. 4:3), and "lip service" that "consists of tradition learned by rote" (Is. 29:13), but God is not impressed or pleased. "This people draw near with their words and honor me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from me" (Isa. 29:13; cf. Matt. 15:8).

- 2) Charnock further comments concerning spiritual worship:

Worship is nothing else but a rendering to God the honor that is due to him, and therefore the right posture of our spirits in it is as much or more due than the material worship in the modes of his own prescribing. . . . One spiritual evangelical believing breath is more delightful to God than millions of altars made up of the richest pearls, and smoking with the costliest oblations, because it is spiritual; and a mite of spirit is of more worth than the greatest weight of flesh. . . . The heart must first be cast into the mould of the gospel, before it can perform a worship required by the gospel. . . . "If worship issuing from a dead nature, is but a dead service. " living action cannot be performed without being knit to a living root. . . . God being a Spirit, calls for a worship in spirit: to withhold this from him, implies him to be some gross corporeal matter. "s a Spirit, he looks for the heart, a wrestling heart in prayer, a trembling heart in the word (Isa. 66:2).¹⁹

¹⁸ Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 291.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 289, 295, 299, 335.

- 3) By way of application, true worship is not a matter of taste, of personal preference for contemporary or traditional style, of an inclination for material and symbolic representation as some suggest. The Lord Jesus here does not offer options, but a mandate for heart worship that needs no artificial props or set rubric or liturgical form. Such worship can take place in a Roman catacomb, a prison cell, a home meeting, or a plain mission hall. Certainly ventilation, acoustics, heating, necessary furniture have practical importance; however, they are but as clothing to the body; they facilitate worship, though they do not produce it. Pure worship is in “the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 29:2).

D. GOD IS LIVING

1. Introduction.

While this world is confronted with the claims of many gods, yet the God of the Bible is distinguished as “the living God” (Jer. 10:6-10). “All other gods are dead, impotent, without personal characteristics. “Gather yourselves and come; draw near together, you fugitives of the nations; they have no knowledge, who carry about their wooden idol and pray to a god who cannot save” (Isa. 45:20; cf. Deut. 4:28; Ps. 115:4-7).

- a. The only God is not dead, but alive. “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:2; cf 84:2; 106:28).
- b. The only God is not asleep, but awake. ¹⁹ Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, 'Awake!' To a mute stone, 'Arise!' And that is your teacher? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, And there is no breath at all inside it. ²⁰ But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him” (Hab. 2:19-20).
- c. The only God is not mute, but vocal. “For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we [Moses and Israel] have, and lived?” (Deut. 5:26; I Cor. 12:2).
- d. The only God is not passive, but active. ²⁶ I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. ²⁷ He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions” (Dan. 6:26-27).

2. Definition.

God has underived, eternal personal energy that is the source of self-motion and intellectual activity; it is related to His *ability* to be self-conscious. Strong comments that “life is *mental energy*, or energy of intellect, affection, and will. God is the living God, as having in his own being a source of being and activity, both for himself and others.”²⁰ While plants have life, as do animals to a greater degree, yet, as Gill explains,

there is an higher degree of life still, which is in rational creatures, angels, and the souls of men; by which they are capable not only of operating on bodies, on matter, without them, but of performing acts within themselves, by a self-motion, suitable to their nature as spirits, and rational ones; such as to understand, to will, to choose, and refuse; love and hate, &c. which may be called the motions of the mind; as the first thoughts of, and inclinations to sin, are called, *motions* (KJV, Rom. 7:5).²¹

- a. The life of God is in Himself. “For just as the Father has life in Himself [ἐν ἑαυτῷ, en heautō], even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself [ἐν ἑαυτῷ, en heautō]” (John 5:26). Charnock adds:

He [God] hath life in his essence, not by participation. He is a sun to give light and life to all creatures, but receives not light or life from anything, and therefore he hath unlimited life; not a drop of life, but a fountain; not a spark of a limited life, but a life transcending all bounds. He hath life in himself; all creatures have their life in him, and from him. . . . “ll life is seated in God, as in its proper throne, in its most perfect purity. God is life; it is in him originally, radically, therefore eternally.”²²

- b. The life of God is revealed in:

- (1) His distinctive, personal name, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14), is the same, “I am [ἐγὼ εἰμι, egō eimi] the way, the truth, and the life” [John 14:6]. The point here is not only that God exists eternally, self-sufficiently, but also that He Himself *actively declares* His vital self-existence; He has lively being in personal terms.
- (2) His activity, that is in contrast with the supposed “activity” of humanly contrived gods. What so impressed King Darius, at the deliverance of Daniel from the lion’s den, was God’s evident saving zeal. “As a consequence, he made a decree concerning the God of Daniel: ‘He is the living God and enduring forever. . . . He delivers and rescues and performs

²⁰ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 251-2.

²¹ John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, p. 36.

²² Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 356.

signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions" (Dan. 6:26-27).

- (3) His triunity, in which all three persons of the Godhead have the same essential life that yet exists in economic relations.
 - (a) *God the Father is living.* "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me" (John 6:57; cf. 5:26).
 - (b) *God the Son is living.* "I am [ἐγὼ εἰμι, egō eimi] the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh" (John 6:51, 57).
 - (c) *God the Holy Spirit is living.* "[God] made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (Ezek. 37:11-14; II Cor. 3:6; Rev. 11:11).
3. God is life-giving, that is He communicates His life. ²⁷ That they [all men] would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children'" (Acts 17:27-28).
- a. This life is imparted to various categories of His creation.
 - (1) God gives vegetative life, such as to plants and trees. ¹¹ Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them'; and it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:11-12).
 - (2) God gives animal life, such as to fish, birds, insects, cattle, reptiles, beasts, and even man at the physical level. ²⁰ Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.' ²¹ God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:20-21, 24-25, 26-27).

- (3) God gives personal life, such as to angels and mankind.
- (a) Both good and bad angels have life from God. ¹⁶ “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16-17).
 - (b) Both elect and reprobate men have life from God.
 - 1) The elect have life from God. “Seeing that His [God’s] divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (II Pet. 1:3).
 - 2) The reprobate have life from God. It is conscious participation in “the lake of fire and brimstone, . . . [being] tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10, 15).
- (4) God gives eternal life, that is to erstwhile dead, then repentant and believing sinners. ²⁷ “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28; cf. 6:35; 17:2; Rom 5:20-21; Eph. 2:1-6).
- (a) This eternal life is the knowledge of union and communion with the only true God through the Holy Spirit ¹⁹ “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. ²⁰ And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (I John 5:19-20; cf. John 17:3).
 - (b) This eternal life is mediated through Jesus Christ. “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (I John 5:11; cf. John 3:16).
 - (c) This eternal life is the gracious gift of God received through faith in Christ crucified. ²³ “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23; cf. John 3:14-16; I Tim. 1:16; I John 5:11).

- b. This life is imparted throughout the course of human history.
- (1) To animal creatures first, limited life. "Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.'²¹ God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good.²² God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'²³ There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.²⁴ Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind'; and it was so.²⁵ God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:20-25).
 - (2) To subsequent innocent humanity, untested life. "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7; cf. 1:26-27).
 - (3) To fallen humanity, temporal life. "¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'" (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:17-19).
 - (4) To national Israel, covenantal life. "Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And in the place where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' It will be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God'" (Hos. 1:10; cf. Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; Isa. 44:1-3; Mal. 3:6).
 - (5) To the church of Jesus Christ, the life of God, eternal life. "But in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15; cf. Matt. 16:16-18; I Tim. 4:10).
- c. This life is imparted for the praise of His glory.
- (1) By way of illustration, Calvin encourages us reverently to appreciate both earthly life and eternal life as follows:

(a) Concerning earthly life:

If we recognize in it [earthly life] no divine benefit, we are guilty of grave ingratitude toward God himself. For believers especially, this [earthly life] ought to be a testimony of divine benevolence, wholly destined, as it is, to promote their salvation. For before he shows us openly the inheritance of eternal glory, God wills by lesser proofs to show himself to be our Father. These are the benefits that are daily conferred on us by him. Since, therefore, this life serves us in understanding God's goodness, should we despise it as if it had no grain of good in itself? We must, then, become so disposed and minded that we count it among those gifts of divine generosity which are not at all to be rejected.²³

(b) Concerning eternal life:

It is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth. . . . "gain, if regeneration into incorruptible life is higher and much more excellent than any present growth, what ought we to think of him from whose power it proceeds?²⁴

- (2) Why has God given life to man? Is it merely for the purpose of man enjoying the exhilaration of personal existence as he exclaims, "It is good to be alive!"? According to the Bible, the answer must be an emphatic "No!", for Scripture declares that God has given life to man so that he might, before anything else, live to praise his Maker. For in a creation that pulsates with life, and especially with living persons, they are better fitted, in that realm, to praise the living, personal God.

- (a) The Book of Psalms, or Book of Praises, to use its Hebrew title, continually reiterates the thought, "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being" (Ps. 104:33; cf. Ps. 63:4; 119:175; 146:2).

- 1) When the soul of man is awakened to the source of its life, it cannot but respond with an eruption of thankful praise and adoration. ⁵ Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. ⁶ Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; Your judgments are like a great deep. O LORD, You preserve man and beast. ⁷ How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! and the children of men

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, IX, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, XIII, 14.

take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. ⁸ They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; and You give them to drink of the river of Your delights. ⁹ For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light" (Ps. 36:5-9). "⁸ Bless our God, O peoples, and sound His praise abroad, ⁹ Who keeps us in life and does not allow our feet to slip." (Ps. 66:8-9).

- 2) When the soul of man finds its only satisfaction in the life of God, it passionately exhorts the whole creation: "¹As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. . . . ⁸The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; and His song will be with me in the night, a prayer to the God of my life" (Ps. 42:1, 8). "Let everything that has breath [life] praise the Lord" (Ps. 150:6).
- (b) By way of illustration, Isaac Watts wrote a hymn based upon Psalm 146 which became a favorite of the founder of Methodism. John Wesley made several minor changes to the wording, and on his death-bed was repeatedly heard to attempt to gasp forth the lines:

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath;
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers:
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.

E. GOD IS IMMUTABLE

1. Introduction.

For man who is restless, wavering, variable, fluctuating, it is difficult for him to comprehend that God is stable, constant, invariable, immutable. Yet it is basic to the problem of this disquiet and agitation in man's soul, that his salvation from unrest is only to be found in the unchanging, steadfast God of the Bible. "¹¹ My days are like a lengthened shadow, and I wither away like grass. ¹² But You, O LORD, abide forever, and Your name to all generations." . . . ²⁵ Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. ²⁶ Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. ²⁷ But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end (Ps. 102:11-12, 25-27).

- a. Strangely, it would seem that unregenerate man is akin to the tempestuous, restless sea “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud” (Isa. 57:20). The unbeliever is so averse to the undeviating God of Scripture that he attempts to change the Changeless One according to the thoughts of our changing mood! They “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” (Rom. 1:23).
- (1) Today, God has become the object of man’s proud scrutiny and modification, not the sovereign Subject beneath whom man reverently bows, confessing that He is *semper idem*, “always the same.” Even in Christian conversation today, He is the object of theological and sentimental speculation, not reverent worship.
 - (2) Man, in professing to be wise, has attempted to change, or exchange, the revelation of the true, unvarying God for material or mental images that need frequent updating. “Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit” (Jer. 2:11; Ps. 106:19-21; Rom. 1:22-23, 25).
 - (3) By way of illustration, the God who declared homosexuality and lesbianism to be unnatural and depraved is now described as being receptive to this behavior. The God who established distinctive male and female roles is now declared to be supportive of male and female egalitarianism.
- b. However, man’s fidgeting, moody ways are reflective of his treadmill existence which, apart from the true and living God, is forever frustrating and unsatisfactory. “³ I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. ⁴ I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; ⁵ I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; ⁶ I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. ⁸ Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. ⁹ Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. ¹⁰ All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Thus I considered all my activities which

my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun." (Eccl. 2:3-11; cf. 2:12-23; 6:1-12).

- (1) Man lusts for change, variety, modernity in place of what he describes as stale and old-fashioned, while the consumer industry fans this endless craving for Athenian novelty with which Paul was also confronted. "Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21).
- (2) By way of illustration, the fashion industry thrives on alternating low and high hemlines, wide and narrow neckties, floral and plain designs, tight and loose fittings, etc. The automobile industry regularly styles its vehicles with curved and sharp features, also endless color variations. Inbuilt obsolescence further caters to the cry for change.
- (3) But man's continuous appetite for greener pastures, new horizons, a fresh start, or simply tomorrow, is never satisfied until he heeds the invitation of the unchanging Christ, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28; cf. John 4:13-14). This is the Savior who is "the same yesterday and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).
- (4) By way of illustration, in his famous hymn "Abide With Me," Henry Lyte vividly contrasts God's unchangeableness with a changing world.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,
 Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
 Change and decay in all around I see,
 O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

2. The immutability of God in a world of change.

- a. By way of definition, God does not change in His essential being, that is in His nature, attributes, and purposes. He is constant, invariable, without mutation. "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." (Mal. 3:6).
 - (1) By way of illustration, in biological science, a mutation results from inherent genetic change, that is variation in genetic structure. Hence, while God acts variously and differently, and not merely repetitively, yet His essential character does not mutate. God's distinguishing traits (perfections) never alter; He is essentially, always of the same essence.

- (2) Immutability arises from other attributes, especially God's self-existence, simplicity, spirituality, and eternity. In this regard Charnock comments:

[God] is unalterably fixed in his being, that not a particle of it can be lost from it, not a mite added to it. . . . In God there can be no alteration by the accession [addition] of anything to make his substance greater or better, or by diminution [subtraction] to make it less or worse; he who hath no being from another cannot but be always what he is. God is the first being, an independent being; he was not produced of himself, or of any other, but by nature always hath been, and therefore cannot by himself, or by any other, be changed from what he is in his own nature. . . . Again, because he is a Spirit, he is not subject to those mutations which are found in corporeal and bodily natures; because he is an absolutely simple Spirit, not having the least particle of composition, he is not capable of those changes which may be in created spirits.²⁵

- (3) God is the Father of the heavens with its luminaries that cast ever-changing shadows. But He does not change in the slightest. "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" (Jas. 1:17).
- (4) God does not improve, modify, or deteriorate, nor does He gain new attributes. There is no development or obsolescence in His character. God is eternally modern, mature, relevant, never old-fashioned or outmoded. His glory is ever the same, always having a fullness of radiance.
- (5) God is exactly the same God who Israel worshiped in the past. (I Kings 8:23; Ps. 72:18-19; Matt. 15:29-31), and the church shall worship in the future. "[According to Peter], the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him" (Acts 3: 13; cf. Rev. 4:1-11).
- (a) The God of the Old Testament, of Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Solomon, and Elijah, is exactly the same as the God of the New Testament, of Jesus of Nazareth, Peter, James, John, and Paul.
- (b) Progressive revelation is the gradual unveiling of the developing purposes of an unchanging God, not the gradual unveiling of the developing character of an evolving God.

²⁵ Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 382.

- (c) God's sameness today, as yesterday, does not guarantee the same events as yesterday. However, He is the same whatever and whenever various events may occur.
- (6) God is unchanging in all of His attributes, even though they may appear to have varying degrees of prominence according to the condition of man. The unity of His being is eternally invariable.
- (a) God is as holy today as He was when manifest on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:16-20) and manifest before Isaiah (Is. 6:1-5), as well as when envisaged by John the Apostle on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:1-19). God was as gracious and merciful, as well as righteous and true, during the days of Noah (Gen. 6:8) as He is today.
 - (b) Yet while God does not change in His essence, His administration of the universe does change or vary. God created the universe, then He rested at its completion and continues to maintain it. God is eternally gracious, and only and ever saves by grace. However His revelation and management of this grace has differed, especially in covenantal terms (Heb. 10:1-10).
- b. The constancy and stability of God's nature are further known by:
- (1) His distinctive and personal name, "Jehovah." Charnock reasons: "It could not truly be said by [God] himself, "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14), if he were such a person or being at this time, and a different person or being at another time."²⁶ Such constancy of being is especially comforting.
 - (2) His Word, promises and covenants (Gen. 17:6-8; II Sam. 7:1-29; I Kings 8:23; Ps. 119:89, 152; Isa. 40:8). It is especially significant in Malachi 3:6 that the nation of Israel is not consumed because of God's covenant loyalty to Jacob (Israel). "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob [to whom the inviolate promise made to Abraham belongs], are not consumed."
 - (a) By way of illustration, Spurgeon exclaims:

If I thought that the notes of the bank of England could not be cashed next week, I should decline to take them; and if I thought that God's promises would never be fulfilled—if I thought that God would see it right to alter some word in his promises—farewell Scriptures! I want

²⁶ Ibid.

immutable things: and I find that I have immutable promises when I turn to the Bible.²⁷

- (b) However, God's promises and covenants must be understood with regard to whom they were addressed, especially the Mosaic Covenant (Ps. 148:19-20). Further, a promise or covenant must be understood as being either conditional or unconditional, temporary or everlasting.
 - (c) Nevertheless, the immutability of God's promises and covenants means, as Balaam was forced to learn (Num. 23:19-20), that man cannot in any way disannul them. "What I am saying is this: the [Mosaic] Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate an [Abrahamic] covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise" (Gal. 3:17).
- (3) His contrast with a continually changing creation, like a storm that highlights the following calm, or the night that causes us to welcome the dawn. For man, this contrast between an unstable universe and a stable God is heightened by the fact that change in the created order tends toward randomness and being disorderly
- (a) By way of illustration, matter, in its molecular composition, is active rather than passive. Even basic chemical elements comprised of molecules, and atoms with their neutrons and electrically charged protons, are involved in movement and change. The Second Law of Thermodynamics further indicates that change in matter is not only continuous, but also necessarily regressive due to the entropy principle, that is an inevitable reduction in the availability of useful energy.
 - (b) Matter in its structure always tends to change from order to randomness, from an arrangement to disarray, from evolution in growth to devolution in the aging process, and never the reverse. However for the Christian, while "our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."
- 1) Seal up a clean room for fifty years and at the end of this period inspection will reveal increasing decay and disintegration rather than improving order and symmetry. Even good maintenance cannot finally stop this inevitable course.

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit*, I, p. 3.

- 2) For man, nowhere is this principle more evident than in the deteriorative course of his own body. Having reached manhood, there is a never-ending downward course in bodily health until death is reached.
- (c) However, God is distinctively unchanging in His essence, and He has remained at rest ever since the creation (Gen. 2:1-2). Consequently the Bible calls upon man not only to confess his crumbling existence, but also acknowledge this immutable Jehovah and enter into the rest of faith in His unchangeable being. ⁹ So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. ¹¹ Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience." (Heb. 4:9-11).
- 1) Creation in general wears out like worn garments, but God remains the same. ²⁵ Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. ²⁶ Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. ²⁷ But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end" (Ps. 102:25-27). Further, the person who yields to this God will continue to be established before Him. "The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You" (Ps. 102:28).
- 2) Man in particular is temporal, like a passing shadow and withering grass, but God is eternal. ¹¹ My days are like a lengthened shadow, and I wither away like grass. ¹² But You, O LORD, abide forever, and Your name to all generations" (Ps. 102:11-12; cf. 103:15-17; Isa. 40:6-8; 57:20-21). This truth then guarantees eventual mercy for Jerusalem. "You will arise and have compassion on Zion; for it is time to be gracious to her, for the appointed time has come" (Ps. 102:13).
- 3) The "counsel of the nations" and the "plans of the peoples" will be nullified, frustrated, and supplanted by the eternal counsel of the Lord. ¹⁰ The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance" (Ps. 33:10-12). Those persons who wisely abdicate from man's sinking ship

will find mercy in the Lord. "Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness" (Ps. 33:18).

3. The immutability of the triune God.

- a. God the Father does not change in His essential being. ¹⁷ In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us." (Heb. 6:17-18; cf. Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17).
 - (1) In His economic, decretal role (Ps. 2:7), as the Father who ordains all things (Eph. 2:11), though distinct from the Son and the Holy Spirit, yet His purposes unchangeably stand. "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand" (Prov. 19:21; Isa. 14:24).
 - (2) However, the Father remains substantially immutable even as are the Son and the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons." (I Cor. 12:4-6).
- b. God the Son does not change in His essential being. ¹⁰ And, "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands; ¹¹ they will perish, but You remain; and they will all become old like a garment, ¹² and like a mantle You will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end" (Heb. 1:10-12, re Christ, cf. Ps. 102:25-27 which refers to Elohim; cf. I Cor. 12:4-6; Heb. 13:7-8).
 - (1) The eternal Christ, proceeds from the bosom of the Father. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . ¹⁸No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained/exegeted Him" (John 1:14, 18). He is "the same yesterday [as pre-incarnate and incarnate] and today [interceding at the Father's right hand], yes and forever [in his consummated kingdom]" (Heb. 13:8).
 - (2) However, the incarnation was not a change in the nature of the Son of God, but his assumption of human flesh. In other words, the eternal Christ took

on humanity. ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

(a) By way of explanation, John Gill explains:

The divine nature in him [Christ] was not changed into the human nature, not the human nature into the divine, nor a third nature made out of them both; was this the case, the divine nature would have been changeable; but so it was not; for as it has been commonly said, "Christ remained what he was, and assumed what he was not;" and what he assumed added nothing to his divine person; he was only *manifest in the flesh*; he neither received any perfection, not imperfection, from the human nature; though that received dignity and honor by its union with him.²⁸

(b) By way of explanation, Spurgeon declares:

There are no furrows on his [God's] eternal brow. No age hath palsied him; . . . He is the great I AM—the Great Unchangeable. Mark you, his essence did not undergo a change when it became united with manhood. When Christ in past years did gird himself with mortal clay, the essence of his divinity was not changed; flesh did not become God, nor did God become flesh by a real actual change of nature; the two were united in hypostatical union, but the Godhead was still the same. It was the same when he was a babe in the manger, as it was when he stretched the curtains of heaven; it was the same God that hung upon the cross, and whose blood flowed down in a purple river, the selfsame God that holds the world upon his everlasting shoulders, and bears in his hands the keys of death and hell. He never has been changed in his essence, not even by his incarnation.²⁹

c. God the Holy Spirit does not change in His essential being. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24; I Cor. 12:4-6).

(1) *The Westminster Confession of Faith* declares that God is, "a most pure spirit [emphasis added], invisible, without body, parts, or passion, immutable."³⁰

²⁸ John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, p. 27.

²⁹ Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit*, I, p. 2.

³⁰ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III, p. 606.

The distinctive person of the Holy Spirit is likewise *most pure*, and thus without parts and incapable of addition or subtraction.

- (2) By way of explanation, Charnock similarly reasons: "Because he [God] is a Spirit, he is not subject to those mutations which are found in corporeal and bodily natures; because he is an absolutely simple Spirit, not having the least particle of composition, he is not capable of those changes which may be in created spirits."³¹

4. The immutability of God, misrepresentations and objections.

- a. It is implied by some representations of immutability that God is necessarily static and lacking in variety of thought and activity. It is as if God is Stoic in His being so that there is no movement in His essence. Any indications of this in Scripture are credited to anthropomorphic or anthropopathic expressions.

- (1) By way of illustration, Bavinck explains in response:

Immutability should not be confused with monotonous inactivity or immobility. . . . There is change round about him; there is change in the relations of men to God; but there is no change in God. . . . The sun remains the same, whether it scorches and singes, or warms and fosters [or melts], a coin remains a coin whether it be called a price or a pledge (Augustine); the pillar remains standing, whether it be called the right or the left-hand column (Thomas Aquinas); . . . [these] all make clear that an object may change in its relations, while it remains the same in essence.³²

- (2) By way of explanation, Strong also clarifies:

God's unchanging holiness requires him to treat the wicked differently from the righteous. When the righteous become wicked, his treatment of them must change. . . . Hence God's immutability itself renders it certain that his love will adapt itself to every varying mood and condition of his children, so as to guide their steps, sympathize with their sorrows, answer their prayers. . . . He seems to change, but it is we who change after all.³³

- b. It is objected that Scripture explicitly declares that God changes His stated purposes by way of repentance. "The LORD was sorry [repented, KJV] that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:10-14; I Sam. 15:35; Ps. 106:45; Amos 7:3; Jonah 3:10).

³¹ Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 382.

³² Herman Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, pp. 151-2.

³³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 258; cf. Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 404-5.

(1) Note that in Genesis 6:6, it is man who has changed in his nature; in I Samuel 15:35, it is Saul who has changed; in Jonah 3:10, it is the Ninevites who have changed. In the cases of Exodus 32:10-14; Psalm 106:45; Amos 7:3, while anthropopathic terms are used, yet God's course of action changes rather than His unchanging, covenant keeping character.

(2) By way of explanation, Boyce describes such statements as,

anthropopathic expressions, intended simply to impress upon men his [God's] great anger at sin, and his warm approval of the repentance of those who has sinned against him. The change of conduct, in men, not God, had changed the relation between them and God. Sin had made them liable to his just displeasure. Repentance had brought them within the possibilities of his mercy.³⁴

(3) By way of explanation, Charnock similarly states:

God accommodates himself in the Scripture to our weak capacity. God hath no more of a proper repentance than he hath of a real body. . . . God therefore frames his language to our dullness, not to his own state, and informs us, by our own phrases, what he would have us learn of his nature, as nurses talk broken language to young children. . . . Therefore repentance in God is only a change in his outward conduct, according to his infallible foresight and immutable will. He changes the way of his providential proceeding according to the carriage of the creature, without changing his will.³⁵

c. It is objected that God must be changeable, otherwise He could not answer prayer. In other words, why should we bother to pray if God's purposes are fixed and inflexible? But do we really pray to change the mind of God? If such a prayer be the case, whose agenda are we interested in?

(1) From a strictly biblical perspective, the simple response would be that God reveals a paradoxical truth to finite man, namely that He is both immutable (Mal. 3:6) and responsive to prayer. ⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matt. 7:7-11).

³⁴ Boyce, *Abstract of Theology*, p. 76.

³⁵ Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 401.

(2) But nowhere in the Bible is the child of God encouraged to pray so that God would change His will. "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (I John 5:14). Quite the opposite is the case. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38; cf. Matt. 6:10; 26:39; John 4:34).

(3) By way of explanation, Boyce declares,

the course of human events has thus been different from what it would have been had there been no prayer and no answer to it. But the mistake arises from supposing that there has been change in God's purpose or action from what he always contemplated." Further, prayer "is a secondary cause, which has a place, like all other secondary causes, which, like other such, is necessary to produce the result. . . . So far then from changing his purpose when he answers prayer, God is in reality only carrying out that purpose.³⁶

d. It is objected that since God is eternally evolving and affected in the process of His being, He cannot be immutable.

(1) Herman Bavinck identifies Gnosticism and Pantheism as denying God's immutability, "by representing him as eternally BECOMING. . . . God is his own creator. He produces himself. Very gradually he attains to personality and self-consciousness."³⁷

(2) More recently, process theology, with its pantheistic overtones, has taught that the being of God is always processive, that is proceeding independently with the world and man. However, since God is becoming, He is not immutable, omniscient, or sovereign. For modern refutations of this perversion of God's character, refer to the works of Gruenler³⁸ and Morey³⁹ where they identify how process theology subjects God to human autonomy and limitations.

(3) A derivative and mediating view of God in relation to process and more orthodox theology is that which is designated as open view theology. In reality it is warmed over Arminianism since it proposes that, to preserve man's autonomy, God takes risks, He yields determination, He learns from experience, He adjusts His course. Thus Feinberg cites John Sanders who declares that, "God's will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that

³⁶ Boyce, *Abstract of Theology*. Pp. 77-78.

³⁷ Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, pp. 146-49.

³⁸ Robert Gordon Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God*.

³⁹ Robert Morey, *Battle of the Gods*.

happens; human decisions and actions make an important contribution too. Thus history is the combined result of what God and his creation decide to do."⁴⁰ Surely this is simply new terminology for semi-pelagianism and synergistic theology.

- (4) The God who is (Ex. 3:13-15), is also the God who actively proceeds for the cause of His people (Ex. 6:2-8). But this is a process of saving activity and not that of character development within God. It is God's covenant immutability that guarantees His saving action (Mal. 3:6). Further, because man is a becoming being, he ought to beware of foisting his own experience upon the transcendent God of Scripture. "²² Professing to be wise, they [ungodly and unrighteous men] became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures" (Rom. 1:22-23; cf. Jer. 2:11).

5. The immutability of God and its practical influence upon man.

- a. According to Packer, we can face changing times. The eastern world of Abraham and Moses may appear different from our modern age. Hence, we may feel remote from the truth of the Bible and its eastern character. Yet we ought not to be of this mind.

Where is the sense of distance and difference, then, between believers in Bible times and ourselves? It is excluded. On what grounds? On the grounds that God does not change. Fellowship with Him, trust in His word, living by faith, 'standing on the promises of God', are essentially the same realities for us today as they were for Old Testament believers."⁴¹

- b. According to Tozer, we can draw near to God with confidence.

In coming to Him at any time we need not wonder whether we shall find Him in a receptive mood. He is always receptive to misery and need, as well as to love and faith. He does not keep office hours nor set aside periods when He will see no one. Neither does He change His mind about anything. Today, this moment, He feels toward His creatures, toward babies, toward the sick, the fallen, the sinful, exactly as He did when He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to die for mankind.⁴²

⁴⁰ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, p. 508.

⁴¹ Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 72.

⁴² Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 59.

- c. According to Pink, we can be consoled by God's promises.

Herein is solid comfort. Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God can! However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, God changes not. If He varied as we do, if He willed one thing today and another tomorrow, if He were controlled by caprice, who could confide in Him? But, all praise to His glorious name, He is ever the same. His purpose is fixed, His will is stable, His word is sure. Here then is a rock [cf. Deut. 32:3-4] on which we may fix our feet, while the mighty torrent is sweeping away everything around us. The permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises (Isa, 54:10).⁴³

- d. According to Charnock, numerous principles are established for our witness and profit.⁴⁴

- (1) We can worship God with encouragement since He is not like the chameleon which changes color every day, but rather is more constant than the laws of the Medes and Persians.
- (2) We can reliably warn sinners that God cannot be expected to alter His holy will. He is the same in being both the enemy of the wicked and the friend of the righteous. There must be a change in man; there can be none in God.
- (3) We can console the faithful by means of His immutable covenant grace, which agreement guarantees the satisfaction of God's elect. "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness" (II Tim. 2:19).
- (4) We can view creation and this world aright, that is as transient, unreliable, and full of decay. Riches, human honor and wisdom, even our children, rise and fall in trustworthiness. Only God has never-fading glory.
- (5) We can learn patience with regard to the certainty of God's will. The length of our trials is appointed by His immutable plan, so that we are not to murmur or bargain for its alteration. However, this unchanging purpose will guarantee the deliverance of God's elect from their tribulations.
- (6) We can learn to imitate God by striving to be immoveable in goodness. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in

⁴³ Pink, *Attributes of God*, p. 39.

⁴⁴ Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 407-19.

the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). While the hypocrite vacillates and breaks his covenant, the child of God is known for his steadfast obedience.

- (7) We can have recourse to a god of undiminished zeal when our spirits begin to flag and our soul cools. He will assuredly add the ballast of His nearness for our stability. This vital union is most promoted by the righteousness of Christ that shall never wear out, and the grace of the Spirit that shall never burn out.
- e. While God alone is immutable, yet by means of evangelistic proclamation, mutable transient man may enter, through faith in the Son of God, into intransient, eternal life. In other words, through Jesus Christ, unstable man is saved by the steadfastness of God whereby he becomes steadfast.
- (1) In Isaiah 40: 6-8, the prophet is commissioned to preach: "6 A voice says, 'Call out.' Then he answered, 'What shall I call out?' All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."
 - (2) In I Peter 1:22-25, the apostle exhorts: "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring Word of God." Then he quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 to teach that fleeting, perishing man, can only partake of imperishable, eternally saving truth, by means of the preached, implanted, "word of the Lord [which] abides forever."

F. GOD IS UNITARY IN HIS ESSENCE

1. Introduction.

The oneness of God has both outward (exclusive) and inward (integral) aspects that ought to be considered in close relationship with each other. God, as one, is both numerically unique and essentially simple. In a time when religious pluralism abounds, this aspect of the character of God calls for renewed emphasis; it is to be anticipated that strenuous opposition to such an exclusive idea will be forthcoming. When God first revealed Himself to Abraham in a polytheistic world (Gen. 12:1, 7), his conversion to monotheism would have appeared to be radical, and probably intolerable. Here was most likely the first cause of anti-Semitism.

- a. When the truth of the one God of the Bible is described in terms of monotheism, the most common perversion of this aspect of His unique oneness is the promotion of polytheism or many gods. The following list well illustrates just how man-originating, man-centered, self-centered and utilitarian these “gods” were. They reproduce, have conflict amongst themselves, and are not always the epitome of virtue.
- (1) For the ancient Greeks and Romans, God was not one with many attributes, but there were many gods having distinctive and decidedly humanistic attributes. These included:
- (a) Saturn, was a major Roman god of agriculture and harvest. He was the father of Jupiter, Pluto, Neptune. The Greeks called Saturn Kronos, meaning time, he being the sower of the seed.
 - (b) Jupiter, was the Roman god of sky and thunder, the grandfather of Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome. As the patron deity of the Roman state, he ruled over laws and social order.
 - (c) Neptune, was the Roman god of water and the sea, as well as horses. The planet Neptune was named after this god, as its deep blue gas clouds gave early astronomers the impression of great oceans.
 - (d) Vulcan, was the Roman god of beneficial and hindering fire, including the fire of volcanoes. He was identified with the Greek god of fire and smithery or metal-working, Hephaestus.
 - (e) Mars, the Roman warrior god, was worshipped by the Roman military legions. Regarded as the legendary father of Rome's founder, Romulus, it was believed that all Romans were descendants of Mars.
 - (f) Mercury, associated with the Greek deity Hermes, was the god of commerce who invented the wheel as well as the element mercury. He was also swift of feet as a messenger.
 - (g) Apollo, was the Roman and Greek god of medicine, healing, the fine arts, light and the sun, truth and prophecy, archery, music, poetry. He was the son of Zeus who could also bring ill-health and plague.
 - (h) Venus, was a Roman goddess, principally associated with love, beauty and fertility, who played a key role in many Roman religious festivals. She was also the equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.

- (i) Diana, was the Roman goddess of hunting, wild animals and woodland, as well as the moon. She was the equivalent of the Greek goddess Artemis. Her twin brother was Apollo.
- (2) Jehovah/Yahweh, the God of Israel and the Bible, is the only Creator, Sustainer, and Savior of this universe, who sharply contrasts with Roman and Greek polytheism. Hence an explanation of the prolific nature of polytheism over the centuries is appropriate at this point.
 - (a) To a certain degree, Hodge is correct in tracing polytheism to pantheism. He writes that,

In no part of the world has pantheism had such a field for development as in India, and nowhere has it brought forth its legitimate effects in such a portentous amount of evil. Nowhere has polytheism been carried to such revolting extremes. . . . Polytheism, which has been almost universal, has its origin in nature worship; and nature worship rests on the assumption that nature is God.⁴⁵

Yet this comment, true as it is, avoids an important explanation concerning basic motivation.

- (b) According to Romans 1:18, 23, polytheism results from the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress [resist, hold back] the truth.” The outcome is that men have “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” Thus man as a sinner finds one God a threat to his coveted autonomy; he prefers a choice that also allows for rejection, selection, and suitability. Monotheism does not allow choice; it calls for unqualified submission, whatever man’s preferences may be. Further, in unbelief, man conceives that one God, as he conceives Him to be, could not handle all of the government and details of the universe. On the other hand, monotheism proposes one God who is so great that He alone, unaided, can both create and govern the universe.
- (c) So Dabney declares, that
 - a more powerful impulse to polytheism arises from the co-action of two natural principles in the absence of the knowledge of God in Christ. One is the sense of weakness and dependence, craving a superior power on whom to lean. The other is the shrinking of conscious guilt from infinite holiness and power. The creature needs a God: the sinner

⁴⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I, pp. 244, 309.

fears a God. The expedient which results is, the invention of intermediate and mediating divinities, more able than man to succor, yet less awful than the infinite God.⁴⁶

b. When the truth of the one God of the Bible is described in terms of personal attributes and triunity, the most common perversion of these aspects of His unique oneness is that He is composed of parts and added qualities.

- (1) God is not a composite being comprised of distinctive attribute compartments or building blocks which operate intermittently or with a degree of separateness.
- (2) God is not distinct from His attributes as if they were external, detached, mere anthropomorphic labels; neither is He pure and simple without distinction.
- (3) God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are not thirds of the being of God; they are distinct personal representations, according to the principle of economic diversity in unity, of the one essential God.

2. The singular unity of God.

a. By definition, Jehovah/Yahweh of the Bible is distinctly, uniquely, exclusively, solely, wholly and only, God.

(1) Francis Pieper well states:

God is in a class by Himself. Every creature has at least something in common with other creatures and exists in duplicate, triplicate, or multiple form. There can be no other God besides God. God is not *unus genere* [one kind], nor *unus specie* [one species], but *unus numero* [one only]. Viewed in His entirety, He cannot be divided into several such entities as He is Himself. God is the absolute monad.⁴⁷

(2) As such, biblical monotheism categorically excludes:

- (a) *Polytheism*. Truth, being, morality, originate from one eternal source, and not from a host of various competing deities who have different characteristics, being unknown as well as known, as was Paul's observation. "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full

⁴⁶ Robert Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 40-1.

⁴⁷ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I, p. 437.

of idols. . . . For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you." (Acts 17:16, 23).

- (b) *Tritheism*. The triunity of the one God means a oneness in essence manifest in three persons, not three Gods that constitute three connecting entities. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have the same divine attributes. The historic, triangular, symbolic illustration well represents this unity of God with diversity in persons. Refer to the final section of this chapter dealing with the trinity of God where the charge of tritheism is dealt with in greater detail..
 - (c) *Dualism*. There are no rival, competing, distinct powers such as light and darkness, good and evil, spirit and matter, within God. Rather He is only one God who is Light, Good, and Spirit. He is always at rest with Himself, not knowing any tension within His being, as is certainly the case with man.
 - (d) *Pantheism*. Although God pervades the universe, yet He was before it existed, He made it all, He transcends it. If all is God and God is all, if nature is God and God is nature, then His biblical, holy uniqueness and distinctiveness above and beyond the creation are impossible characteristics. Man is not part of God, but subject to Him.
- (3) As such, biblical monotheism positively establishes:
- (a) *The unity of the human race*. Man, originally made in the image of God, albeit as presently fallen, is consequently, without exception, a united race that bears the marks of one Creator. In this, though *not* in a redemptive sense, all men are "the children of God" (Acts 17:28-29).
 - (b) *The unity of the universe*. Such a world-view unites the creation and nature in both structure and purpose, in contrast with an alternative world of conflict and chaos. Thus the God of Abraham establishes the heart of a theocentric world view.
 - (c) *The unity of history*. The course of human events is a tableau, with diverse yet connected patterns, that progresses towards a righteous and consummate destiny that has God at its center. The rise and fall of empires is according to the one, progressing purpose of God.

- (d) *The unity of morality.* The one God has one standard of righteousness to which all mankind must submit in the only possible harmony. The contradictory morality of polytheism is excluded since it has no unified standard of justice which judges all men.
- b. The extensive and united testimony of the Bible is to the unique oneness of God from several perspectives.
- (1) Boyce gives a comprehensive list of aspects of God's oneness as follows.⁴⁸
- (a) God explicitly is one. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" (Deut. 6:4). "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5; cf. Mal. 2:10; Mark 12:29, 32; Eph. 4:5-6; Jas. 2:19).
- (b) There is no other god besides God. "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other" (Deut. 4:39; cf. 4:35; I Sam. 2:2; II Sam. 7:22; I Kings 8:60; Isa. 44:6, 8; 45:5-6, 21-22; 46:9; Joel 2:27).
- (c) There is no other god to be compared with God. "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?" (Ex. 15:11; cf. 8:10; 9:14; II Sam. 7:22; I Kings 8:23; II Chron. 6:14; Isa. 40:25; 46:5; Jer. 10:6).
- (d) God is God alone. "⁴ Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (I Cor. 8:4-6; cf. II Sam. 22:32; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 18:31; 86:10; Isa. 37:16; 43:10, 12; 46:9; John 17:3).
- (e) God alone is to be worshiped. "¹ Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only'" (Matt. 4:10; cf. Ex. 20:4-5; 34:14; I Sam. 7:3; II Kings 17:36; Rom. 1:25; Rev. 19:10).

⁴⁸ Boyce, *Abstract of Theology*, p. 58.

- (f) No one else is to be accepted as God. "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isa. 42:8; cf. Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7; Hos. 13:4).
- (g) God is supreme over all so-called gods. "4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens." (Ps. 96:4-5; cf. Deut. 10:17; Josh. 22:22; Jer. 14:22; I Cor. 8:4-6).
- (h) God only is the true God. "But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation" (Jer. 10:10; I Thess. 1:9).
- (2) Deuteronomy 6:4 or the Shema, from **שְׁמַע**, shama, to hear, is the fundamental confession of monotheistic Judaism, which has customarily been the motto of daily Jewish devotions as well as often the Jewish martyr's last cry: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, and the LORD is one!"
- (a) While there are many so-called elohim, **אֱלֹהִים**, or gods, yet Jehovah/Yahweh, **יְהוָה**, alone is the true God of Israel who is exclusively to receive total, obedient, loving devotion. "4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5).
- (b) Primarily, concerning Deuteronomy 6:4-5, there is reference to *active acknowledgment*, or confession for the confessor, that Jehovah/Yahweh only receives exclusive allegiance. "You will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them" (Josh. 23:7; cf. Exod. 20:2-3; 23:24;).
- (c) Secondly, there is reference to an *objective acknowledgment* whereby this Jehovah/Yahweh is the only existent God in the universe. "Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none" (Isa. 44:8; 45:5, 18, 22).
- (d) What exactly is the "oneness" here described? The Hebrew word is echad, **אֶחָד**, as in Genesis 1:9; 2:24, which often means a distinctive,

united oneness that certainly enables compatibility with the triunity of God. Michael Brown adds:

So also, in Exodus 36:13, God instructs Moses to join the many pieces of the tabernacle together so that it will be “one” (*'echad*; see also Exod. 26:6, 11; 36:18). There are many components but one, unified tabernacle. The Bible also speaks of Israel being “one nation” (*goy 'echad*; see II Sam. 7:23; Ezek. 37:22), just as in the Pledge of Allegiance we in America speak of being ‘one nation under God.’⁴⁹

However this diversity in unity is distinct from *yachid*, יָחִיד (Gen. 22:2, 12; Ps. 22:20; Jer. 6:26; Zech. 12:10) meaning essential, absolute oneness which would disallow a triunity of persons.⁵⁰

- (e) So the truth of monotheism in the Old Testament represented by Deuteronomy 4:39; 6:4; Zechariah 14:9, finds harmonious continuity in the New Testament. “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3; Rom. 16:27; I Cor. 8:4-6; I Tim. 2:5-6; Jas. 2:19; Jude 25).
- c. From a logical point of view, the idea of two or more gods is self-contradictory since neither of them could be the absolute and perfect independent being. Either god would limit the other and disqualify his godhood.⁵¹ A multiplicity of gods is but a representation of their individual frailty.
- d. The practical significance of God’s exclusive oneness.
 - (1) It is a monumental misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 6:4 to suggest that this charter of monotheism is a superior religious principle or creed that nevertheless has no vital importance.
 - (a) The resultant demand of Deuteronomy 6:5 for love that is exclusively directed toward God is the highest of moral imperatives from which all other true ethical behavior on a horizontal level flows. “And this commandment we have from Him [God], that the one who loves God should love his brother also” (I John 4:21; cf. Matt. 22:37-40).
 - (b) However, as Keil and Delitzsch point out, “the motive for this [love toward God] is to be found in the words ‘thy God,’ in the fact that Jehovah was Israel’s God, and had manifested Himself to it as one

⁴⁹ Michael Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, II, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, pp. 104-6.

⁵¹ Boyce, *Abstract of Theology*, pp. 57-8; Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 259.

God."⁵² God was Israel's God because He had revealed Himself through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and as a consequence redeemed His chosen people.

- (2) Bavinck describes the consequences of neglect of this doctrine as follows:

When the confession of the only true God begins to weaken and to be denied, and the much longed for unity offered by pantheism satisfies neither the mind nor the heart, then the solidarity of the universe and of the human race, of religion, morals, and truth succumbs with it, and can no longer be maintained; consequently, nature and history break up into fragments, and as a result of conscious or subconscious polytheistic leanings, there is today a resuscitation of every kind of superstition and idolatry. The time in which we are living furnishes an abundance of evidence for this statement and for that very reason the open confession of the only true God is today even more vitally necessary than formerly.⁵³

- e. Hence, the unity of God has a particular unifying effect upon man which rescues him from fragmentation and moral disunity. As the exclusive true God, His children are drawn together in worshipping Him alone. Polytheistic worship would, by its very nature, lead to people being divided in their allegiance.
- (1) Salvation is only in Jehovah (Ps. 3:8; Jonah 2:9). Those who are saved are united to one another in being united to the only Jehovah. ³ Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:3-6).
- (2) Idolatry is expressly, universally forbidden in any form. ¹⁵ So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. ¹⁹ And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven" (Deut. 4:15-19; cf. Ex. 20:3-5). Hence worship, both individual and corporate, must be

⁵² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, III, p. 323.

⁵³ Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, pp. 167-8.

directed to the only true God according to His terms. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24). Such specificity concerning the need of singular devotion being offered to God is especially lacking in today's evangelical world.

- f. Timothy Dwight perceptively concludes with regard to the doctrine of the unity of God:

The oneness of God exhibits the wickedness of men. The one perfect God, formerly known to all nations, has been substituted for innumerable, sinful, stupid, blind, deaf, and dead gods. Why? Because men loved not to retain God in their knowledge. Thus the human mind has loved to recede as far as possible from its maker.⁵⁴

Thus the oneness of God strongly necessitates knowledge of Him by means of revelation, that is understanding of the true and living Jehovah of Abraham, above and beyond creation, and especially concerning His character. Hence, the preached and taught Word of God must first declare the nature of the God of salvation before the salvation of God. ²³ For while I [Paul] was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ 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; ²⁵ 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; ²⁶ 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, ²⁷ 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" (Acts 17:23-27; cf. Isa. 6:9).

3. The simple unity of God.

- a. By definition, God is not an assemblage of attribute parts or a mixture of character additives. Rather, He is simple, that is pure in the totality of His full being. Yet God's simplicity does not lack the reflection of variety any more than a flawlessly pure diamond lacks the reflection of distinctive facets and colors.

- (1) For Dabney, God's simplicity means that, "He is uncompounded, that His substance is ineffably [unspeakably] homogenous, that it does not exist by the assemblage of atoms, and is not discernible [divisible]."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Timothy Dwight, *Dwight's Theology*, p. 23. Related to Jonathan Edwards through his mother, Dwight became president of Yale College in 1795.

⁵⁵ Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 43.

- (2) Similarly, Bavinck declares:

By simplicity is meant the quality of being uncompounded or incomposite. If God be compounded of parts, as a body is composed of parts, of genus and differentia, substance and accident, matter and form, power and activity, essence and existence, his perfection, unity, independence and immutability cannot be maintained. . . . God is *one* in every respect. He *is* whatever he *has*."⁵⁶

- (3) The necessity of this definition is chiefly based upon the finite, spatial, temporal, sensual perception of man who, notwithstanding his soulish/spiritual nature, is yet confined to a material universe that is constantly defined in terms of composition and categorical order. However, God is neither distinctively complex nor indistinguishably simple, but rather distinctively simple. Thus Bavinck attributes to Augustine that, "God is simple in his multiplicity and multifold in his simplicity."⁵⁷
- b. Scripture declares that God *is* "spirit" (John 4:24), "light" (I John 1:5), "love" (I John 4:8), "eternal" (Deut. 33:7), which attributes of His pure and perfect essence are not merely parts of His being, but *are* intrinsically His being. Note that John does not merely write that God *has* spirit, light, love, but that God *is* spirit, light, love.
- c. Objections and answers to the legitimacy of God's attribute of simplicity are as follows:
- (1) The simplicity of God is a logical abstraction without biblical foundation. But the extensive scriptural evidence for the pure spirituality of God (cf. pp. 277-285) demands simplicity and is utterly opposed to the idea of a composite nature.
- (2) The simplicity of God is in conflict with His personal triunity. To this Boyce responds that the Trinity,
- presents to us three Persons who are not three gods, but one God, and, . . . shows us that the unity of God is to be found in his nature or essence and not in the personal relations in that essence, so that there is but one divine nature or essence, one being, one God, although there are three persons subsisting therein, who, by virtue of that subsistence, are each God."⁵⁸

In other words, simplicity pertains to essence, not personal manifestation.

⁵⁶ Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, pp. 170, 168.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵⁸ Boyce, *Abstract of Theology*, p. 60.

- (3) The simplicity of God is in conflict with the distinctive manifestations of His attributes. Pieper raises this problem and explains:

But does Scripture not become involved in a contradiction when it ascribes to God both simplicity and a plurality of attributes? True, God is one, indivisible, uncompounded, for, . . . all the divine attributes are God's invisible being. But this is simply beyond all human comprehension. Therefore God Himself has condescended to us, divided Himself, as it were, into component parts, and because of our finite intellect permits us to conceive of God's attributes, e.g., justice, omnipotence, grace, as following one after another or as existing alongside one another. This is a knowledge of God 'in part,' as St. Paul says in I Corinthians 13:12.⁵⁹

- d. In practical terms, the simplicity of God means that He is not to be equated with the sphere of earthly complexity, even though He takes on human flesh and sympathy through the man Christ Jesus.

- (1) The persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of the same simple essence and pure being. Here is perfect diversity in unity.
- (2) The attributes of God reflect His fullness, but they do not describe His composition.
- (3) True worshipers of God are to behold all of His attributes as glorious facets of His pure fullness. So Isaac Watts had written:

Almighty God, to Thee
 Be endless honors done,
 The undivided Three,
 And the mysterious One,
 Where reason fails, with all her powers,
 There faith prevails and love adores.

G. GOD IS A TRIUNITY OF PERSONS

1. Introduction.

If by now our confessed finite understanding of the infinite Jehovah has humbled us, then we are better prepared to study the mystical biblical revelation of the triunity of God. At the outset let it be declared that the scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity is substantial, even if admittedly implicit with regard to the specific term in question. But he who refuses to yield to clear biblical teaching that transcends human

⁵⁹ Pieper, *Dogmatics*, I, p. 439.

understanding, such at the eternity of God or His triunity, is to be guilty of original idolatry by man (Gen. 3:5-6) and Lucifer (Isa. 14:12-14), that is aspiration to supreme human autonomy and deification. L. S. Chafer quotes M. Coquerel in this respect: "God is the only intelligent Being, for Whom no mystery exists. To be surprised, to be indignant at encountering mysteries, is to be surprised, is to be indignant at not being God."⁶⁰

Therefore the argument that the doctrine of the Trinity is at best obscure, especially because the term "Trinity" is nowhere mentioned in the Bible, needs to be dispensed with at the outset. Robert Morey, in his recent definitive work, *The Trinity, Evidence and Issues*, responds as follows:

What if someone were to issue the challenge: I challenge you to find the word 'attribute' in the New Testament and all such words as "omnipotent," "omnipresent," etc. If you cannot find these words in the Bible and if you cannot find them defined in the modern sense, then I refuse to believe in them. We would look with pity at such convoluted statements. To demand that a first century document use words and terms which did not develop until centuries later is patently absurd. . . . The word 'attribute' is not the issue. It is the idea that the word expresses. . . . The same situation holds true when we deal with the theological word or term "Trinity." The word "Trinity" is no more found in the Bible than the word "attribute." It is a theological term coined by the Christian Church to express the biblical truth that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶¹

- a. From another perspective, John Stott describes the humbling effect of the doctrine of the Trinity as follows:

[God's] grace bears a Trinitarian shape. First, in both spheres [of the Bible and the cross] the Father took the initiative, teaching us what we could not otherwise know, and giving us what we could not otherwise have. Secondly, in both the Son has played a unique role as the one mediator through whom the Father's initiative was taken. He is the Word made flesh, through whom the Father's glory was manifested. He is the sinless one made sin for us that the Father might reconcile us to himself. Moreover, the word God spoke through Christ and the work God did through Christ were both *hapax* [Greek], completed once and for all. Nothing can be added to either without derogating from the perfection of God's word and work through Christ. Then thirdly, in both revelation and redemption the ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential. It is he who illumines our minds to understand what God has revealed in Christ, and he who moves our hearts to receive what God has achieved through Christ. Thus in both spheres the Father has acted through the Son and acts through the Spirit. It is this horizon of Trinitarian grace which, more than anything else, makes humility appropriate, the humility which acknowledges our dependence on grace.⁶²

⁶⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, I, p. 273.

⁶¹ Robert Morey, *The Trinity, Evidence and Issues*, pp. 433-4.

⁶² John Stott, *Essentials*, pp. 336-37.

- b. Yet R. T. France is also correct when he describes the *perception* by many of the triunity of God as unpopular, a puzzle, a scandal to Muslim and Jew, a joke and an embarrassment. Why is this so? Because Christians have lost sight of a genuine biblical crisis that erupted in early church history. To recapture this setting is to discover that this vital truth, “belongs not to the cold detachment of the philosopher’s study, but to the warm and living experience of the man who has come to know Jesus Christ as the divine Redeemer, and in whose life the Holy Spirit has made God a reality.”⁶³
- c. Away then with any approach to this truth which anticipates mere metaphysical speculation! In I Peter 1:1-3, the Apostle Peter, having contemplated the gracious election of the *Father*, the sanctifying work of the *Spirit*, and the sprinkled blood of *Jesus Christ*, immediately responds to this revelation of triune mystery with the cry of adoring praise, “Blessed be . . . God.” No doubt it is for this reason that since the second century Christians have joyously sung the doxology, *Gloria Patri*:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen.

More recently Reginald Heber’s notable hymn published in 1826, the year of his death, has become a universal proclamation of God’s glorious triunity.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!

2. The Trinitarian controversy between Athanasius and Arius.

- a. The great doctrinal controversy of the first four centuries of the early church concerned the nature of Christ’s person, and especially in relation to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. In this context, including the heretical challenge of Gnosticism and Manichaeism, Tertullian of Carthage (c. 200 A.D.) first used the term “Trinity”, and in spite of holding erroneous views of subordinationism along with Origen, yet he defended the imprecise declaration of the Apostles’

⁶³ R. T. France, *The Living God*, pp. 102-3.

Creed.⁶⁴ During this prelude to the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., at which the doctrine of the Trinity was more exactly defined, four Trinitarian views arose.

- (1) There are three distinct Gods, or tritheism, a reactionary perspective that was soon repudiated. Here was diversity without unity, indeed a subtle form of polytheism.
 - (2) There is one God who manifests Himself in three ways or modes, variously known as patripassianism, modalism, or Sabellianism, which was officially condemned in 263 A.D.
 - (3) There is one God whose first creation or generation was Christ through whom the Spirit is produced. Known as subordinationism or Arianism, this virulent heresy has its modern counterparts in Unitarianism, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christadelphians.
 - (4) There is one God, that is one in essence, who exists in three distinct persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who have that same essence. This is known as biblical, orthodox Trinitarianism.
- b. In 325 A.D., The Council of Nicea declared that Jesus Christ was, "begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance [ὁμοούσιος, homoousios] with the Father, through whom all things were made."⁶⁵ Concerning this distinction regarding Christ's essence, the Emperor Constantine is said to have commented that his kingdom was divided by the Greek letter "iota," for the following reasons.
- (1) The party of Arius of Alexandria declared that Jesus Christ was ὁμοιοῦσιος, homoiousios, with the Father, that is of *similar* substance to the Father. Banished, then restored to favor for a time, yet Athanasius refused to have communion with Arius. Arianism from then on has always been regarded as cardinal heresy.
 - (2) The party of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, declared that Jesus Christ was ὁμοούσιος, homoousios, with the Father, that is of the *same* substance of the Father. Although victorious at Nicea, yet Athanasius was exiled

⁶⁴ Refer to Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 82; Otto Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, I, pp. 143-69. *The Apostles' Creed* (c. 400 A.D.) declares: "I Believe in God the Father almighty, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary." Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 33.

⁶⁵ Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 35.

several times due to powerful Arian influence. However, the truth he so relentlessly upheld finally triumphed after his death at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. The famous Scottish historian, Thomas Carlyle, who at first sneered that Christendom was torn in pieces over a diphthong, later confessed that through Athanasius Christianity was delivered from ignominy as a mere Jewish sect.⁶⁶

- c. By c. 410 A.D., the Trinitarian controversy came to a period of settlement with the publication of one of Augustine's most important works, namely, *On the Trinity*. At the beginning, the Bishop of Hippo invites us to "enter together upon the path of charity, and advance towards Him of whom it is said, 'Seek His face evermore' (Ps. 105:4). And I would make this pious and safe agreement, . . . in the case of those which inquire into the unity of the Trinity, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; because in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable."⁶⁷
3. The biblical teaching of God's three-in-oneness.
- a. It is readily admitted that while the triunity of God is foreshadowed and intimated in the Old Testament, yet its greater clarity and unveiling is evidenced in the New Testament. This should not surprise us if we accept the biblical principle of progressive revelation, that is the increasing disclosure through inspiration of pure divine truth. As God has progressively revealed His saving purposes through Abraham and Moses to Christ, from promise to fulfillment and shadow to substance, so He has similarly unveiled the glory of His triunity in advancing detail, and especially in the incarnation of the Son of God.
 - b. The persons of the triune God revealed corporately as God.
 - (1) The Old Testament witness. Recall the "oneness" of God according to Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" Again, the Hebrew word here is echad, אֶחָד, as in Genesis 1:9; 2:24, which often means a distinctive, united oneness, as with the union of a man with a woman, that certainly enables compatibility with the triunity of God.
 - (a) God is a plurality of persons, represented by a plural noun governed by a singular verb. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26; cf. 11:7; Isa. 6:8). Even if we have a plurality of majesty here, yet it still accommodates the plurality of the Trinity.

⁶⁶ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 329.

⁶⁷ Aurelius Augustine, *On The Trinity*, VII, p. 5.

- (b) God is separate from the Angel of Jehovah who is yet designated as God “¹ Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. ² The LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?’ ³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel” (Zech. 3:1-3; cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 18:1-19:29).
- (c) God is distinct from the person of the Spirit of God. “¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them. ¹¹ Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them?” (Isa. 63:10-11; cf. Gen. 1:2; Ex. 31:1-4; Zech. 4:6).
- (d) God is triune by intimation. “²⁴ The LORD bless you, and keep you; ²⁵ The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace” (Num. 6:24-26); “And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3). Also there is mention together of the persons of “the Lord,” “the angel of His presence,” and “His Holy Spirit” (Isa. 63:7-10).
- (2) The New Testament witness. The coming of the Son of God and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, according to the purpose of God the Father, bring understanding of the Trinity that is inevitable. Note that the following evidence comes from four entrenched Jewish monotheists, Matthew, John, Paul, Peter.
- (a) The triune doctrine of Matthew.
- 1) The Father and Spirit join in the exaltation of the Son. “¹⁶ After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:16-17; cf. 17:4-5).
 - 2) Following conversion, Christians are to identify with the “name” (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “Go therefore and

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

(b) The triune doctrine of John.

- 1) The believer's salvation involves intimacy of relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever. . . . But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:16, 26; cf. 1:33-34; 15:26).
- 2) The believer's intimate union with God involves the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "²⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:20-22; cf. I John 4:13-14).

(c) The triune doctrine of Paul.

- 1) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are intimately involved in the believer's salvation, "¹³ But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. ¹⁴ It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess. 2:13-14; cf. Eph. 1:3-14). The Trinity is also involved in resultant fellowship, (Eph. 4:4-6), and service (I Cor, 12:4-6).
- 2) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are addressed in prayer on equal terms. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (II Cor. 13:14).

(d) The triune doctrine of Peter.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are intimately involved in the believer's salvation. "¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia,

Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:1-5).

c. The persons of the triune God revealed individually as God.

The defense of the doctrine of the Trinity does not rest upon arithmetical calculations, or their use for its disproof for that matter. At the heart of this essential doctrine is the divine character of God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Once it has been established that all three of these persons are deity, that is having the same divine essence or substance, then the doctrine of the Trinity comes into clear focus. It is significant that opponents of the Trinity give great attention to disproving the deity of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Thus it is fundamental that the following truth, outlined by Boyce,⁶⁸ be seen to be upheld by the Bible.

(1) The Father is God.

- (a) God has a Son, hence God is Father. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1; cf. Luke 1:35; John 5:25; 10:36; 11:27; Acts 9:20; Gal. 4:4; I John 4:15; 5:5, 20, 21).
- (b) The Father is expressly named God. "Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (II John 3; cf. John 1:18; 5:18; Rom. 15:6; I Cor. 15:24; II Pet. 1:17).

(2) The Son is God.

- (a) He is directly called God. "Thomas answered [Jesus] and said to Him, '[You are] my Lord and my God!'" (John 20:28; cf. Matt. 1:23; John 1:1).
- (b) Jesus Christ is also called Lord, that is deity as well as sovereign. "'So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:28; cf. Matt. 12:8;

⁶⁸ Boyce, *Abstract of Theology*, pp. 126-34.

22:41-45; Luke 6:46; 20:41-44; John 13:13, 14; Acts 10:36; Rom. 14:9; I Cor. 2:8; Gal. 1:3; 6:18; Phil. 2:11; II Thess. 2:16; Jude 4; Rev. 17:14; 19:13, 16).

- (c) He is worshiped as deity. "And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!' (Matt. 14:33; cf. Luke 24:52; Acts 7:59-60; II Cor. 12:8-9; Phil. 2:10; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:8-14; 7:9-12).
- (d) He is to be honored equally with the Father. "So that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23).
- (e) His relations to the Father are those of identity and unity. "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God [Son] who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18; cf. 5:17-19; 8:16, 19; 10:30; 12:44, 45; 14:7-11; 15:24; Col. 1:15, 19; 2:9; Heb. 1:3; I John 2:23, 24).
- (f) They are equally known to each other, and unknown to others. "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father" (John 6:46; cf. Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18; 10:15).
- (g) He is the creator of all things. "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3, cf. 10; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:10).
- (h) He upholds and preserves all things. "¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17; cf. John 5:17; Heb. 1:3).
- (i) He is the manifestation of the Divine Being in this world. "¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. . . . ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:10, 14; cf. 1:18; 14:8-11; 16:28-30; Col. 1:15; I Tim. 3:16; I John 1:2).
- (j) He is greater than all others, including Moses, David, Solomon, Jonah, John the Baptist. "For He [Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has

more honor than the house" (Heb. 3:3; cf. Matt. 3:11; 12:41-42; Mark 12:37; Luke 11:31-32; John 1:17; Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:4-5; I Pet. 3:22).

- (k) He is the source of all spiritual blessing.
- 1) He gives the Holy Spirit. "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49; John 16:7; 20:22; Acts 2:33).
 - 2) He forgives sins. "⁴⁷ For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.' ⁴⁸ Then He said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven.' ⁴⁹ Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:47-49; cf. Mark 2:5-10; Luke 5:20-24; Acts 5:31).
 - 3) He gives peculiar peace. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27; cf. 16:33).
 - 4) He gives light. "Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12; cf. 1:4, 7-9; 9:5; 12:35, 46; I John 1:5-7; Rev. 21:23).
 - 5) He gives faith. "³¹ Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:32; cf. 17:5; Heb. 12:2).
 - 6) He gives eternal life. "Even as You gave Him [Jesus] authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life" (John 17:2).
 - 7) He confers all the spiritual gifts bestowed upon his churches. "⁸ Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.' ⁹ (Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He gave some as

apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:8-12).

- (l) All the incommunicable attributes of God are ascribed to him.
- 1) Self-existence. "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself" (John 5:26; cf. 2:19; 10:17, 18).
 - 2) Eternity of existence. "¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2; cf. 17:5, 24; Heb. 1:8, 10-12; I John 1:2).
 - 3) Omniscience. "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep' (John 21:17; cf. Matt, 9:4; 12:25; Mark 2:8; Luke 6:8; 9:47; 10:22; John 1:48; 2:24-25; 10:15; 16:30; Col. 2:3; Rev. 2:23).
 - 4) Omnipresence. "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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20; cf. 18:20; John 3:13; Eph. 1:23).
 - 5) Omnipotence. "They became very much afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?' (Mark 4:41; cf. Matt. 28:18; Luke 21:15; John 1:3; 10:18; I Cor. 1:24; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 3:21; Col. 2:10; Rev. 1:18).
 - 6) Immutability. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8; cf. 1:11-12).
- (m) The judgment of the world is entrusted to him. "²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you;

DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS” (Matt. 7:21-23; cf. 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:10; II Cor. 5:10; II Tim. 4:1).

(n) Absolute equality with the Father, not only of will but of nature, is ascribed to him.

1) Equality in works. “¹⁷ But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” ¹⁸ For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:17-18).

2) Equality in knowledge. “Even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:15; cf. Luke 10:2).

3) Equality in nature. “The Jews answered Him, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God’ (John 10:33; cf. 5:18; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3).

(3) The Holy Spirit is God.

(a) He has personality.

1) He has intelligence, “¹⁰ For to us God revealed them [glorious things] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2:10-11), feelings “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30); will “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (I Cor. 12:11).

2) He can be *obeyed*, “¹⁹ While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.’ ²¹ Peter went down to the men and said, ‘Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?’” (Acts 10:19-21), *lied to* “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy

Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3), *resisted* "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did" (Acts 7:51), *reverenced* "Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11), *blasphemed* "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven" (Matt. 12:31), *grieved* "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30), *outraged* "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:29).

- 3) He is identified by masculine rather than neuter pronouns. "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me" (John 15:26; cf. 16:7-8, 13-14).
- (b) The activity of Jehovah in the Old Testament is ascribed to the Spirit in the New Testament "The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing" (Heb. 9:8), cf. "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying," (Exod. 25:1) "Aaron shall make atonement on its [the altar's] horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD" (Exod. 30:10); (Isa. 6:9; cf. Acts 28:25-27).
- (c) The creation of the world is ascribed to the Spirit. "By His [the Almighty's] breath the heavens are cleared/covered" (Job 26:13; cf. Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30).
- (d) He is said to search and know even the deep things of God. "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God" (I Cor. 2:10).
- (e) He is expressly called God. "³ But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to

men but to God.' . . .⁹ Then Peter said to her [Sapphira], 'Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well' (Acts 5:3-4, 9).

4. The triunity of God defined, detailed, and defended.

a. The doctrine of the Trinity defined.

- (1) Although the following definition by Augustine is extremely precise, yet the serious Christian ought to study it carefully. He states of the Trinity,

that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore that they are not three Gods, but one God: although the Father has begotten the Son, and so He who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so He who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Trinity. Yet not that this Trinity was born of the Virgin Mary, and crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven, but only the Son. Nor, again, that this Trinity descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus when He was baptized; nor that, on the day of Pentecost, after the ascension of the Lord, when 'there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind,' the same Trinity 'sat upon each of them with cloven tongues like as of fire,' but only the Holy Spirit. Nor yet that this Trinity said from heaven, 'Thou art my Son,' whether when He was baptized by John, or when the three disciples were with Him in the mount, or when the voice sounded, saying, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again;' but that it was a word of the Father only, spoken to the Son; although the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as they are indivisible, so work indivisibly. This is also my faith, since it is the Catholic faith.⁶⁹

- (2) *The Westminster Confession of Faith* declares:

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Augustine, *On The Trinity*, VII, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁰ Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III, pp. 607-8.

- b. The doctrine of the Trinity detailed.
- (1) The clarification of terminology. Both the classic and more modern definitions of the Trinity use terms that need careful explanation, and two in particular.
 - (a) *Person*. A human *person* is not to be our model here. Pieper cites Luther in this regard: "Our terminology is inadequate and is really only a stammering. . . . [But] we have no better term."⁷¹ A common alternative is the more theological *distinct subsistence*. Or consider, a triune person is, "the individual framework of essential, rational, self-existent Divine Being." Of course three human persons have three distinct natures. But God is one indivisible nature in three persons! Here is clear biblical truth, yet also here is mystery!
 - (b) *Substance*. This concerns underlying essential nature, as distinct from outward manifestation. God is one or singular in pure essence, or pure being, or pure nature, or underlying being. More particularly, God's essence is reflected in His attributes, which are the fullness of His being. His glory or radiance is the outshining of His substance
 - (c) Conclusion. God is one in substance or pure essence or essential Being, while subsisting in three distinct persons. The persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have the same essence, hence the same attributes and glory, since they are three individuals of the one God of Abraham and Israel.
 - (2) The relation of the persons of the Trinity to each other.
 - (a) In the one being of God there are triune interpersonal relationships. This is sometimes referred to as the *ontological* Trinity which deals with logical, not chronological, derivation.⁷²
 - 1) God the Father has *eternal paternity*. "Yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him" (I Cor. 8:6); cf. Eph. 3:14-15), without generation or procession.

⁷¹ Pieper, *Dogmatics*, I, p. 409.

⁷² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 88-9.

- 2) God the Son has *eternal filiation*, or sonship by means of generation by the Father. “¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God [the Father]” (John 1:1-2, cf. Ps. 2:7; John 1:14, 18; I John 4:9), yet without procession from the Father.
- 3) God the Holy Spirit has *eternal procession*. “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me” (John 15:26; note the present tense), from the Father and the Son (cf. John 15:26; 16:7; 20:22), without generation.

(b) So Shedd cautions us:

The most enigmatical part of the doctrine of the Trinity is in the hypostatical character. What is this paternity of the Father? and this filiation of the Son? and this being spirated or procession of the Spirit? Since revelation has given only the terms, Father, Son, and Spirit, with the involved ideas of paternity, filiation, and procession, the human intellect can go no further towards a metaphysical explanation than these terms and ideas will yield materials. And this is not far.⁷³

(3) The relation of the persons of the Trinity to external activity.

(a) In the one being of God there is distinct, personal manifestation within the Trinity. This is sometimes referred to as the *economic* Trinity which deals with the distinctive individual activity of certain attributes by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. According to Berkhof,⁷⁴ these distinctions are as follows.

- 1) The Father designs the work of creation, providence, and redemption. This activity is *from* the Father. “For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’” (II Pet. 1:17; cf. I Cor. 8:6).
- 2) The Son mediates the work of creation, providence, and redemption. This activity is *through* the Son. “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:10; cf. 1:3, 10; I Cor. 8:6).

⁷³ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, p. 278.

⁷⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 88-9, 91, 85, 98.

- 3) The Holy Spirit consummates the work of creation, providence, and redemption. This activity is *in* the Spirit. “¹⁸ For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, ¹⁹ in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:18-19; cf. Jude 20).

- (b) Bavinck further explains:

All ‘outgoing works’ have *one* Author, namely God; but they are produced by means of the co-operation of the *three* persons; and in the works of creation, redemption, and sanctification, a definite place and order is assigned to each of these three. All things are originated by the Father, are carried out through the Son, and are brought to completion by the Holy Spirit. . . . [While there is overlap,] nevertheless, in the economic sense the work of creation is ascribed more particularly to the Father, the work of redemption to the Son, and the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit.⁷⁵

- (4) The relation of the persons of the Trinity to self-consciousness.

- (a) In contemplating the oneness and solitariness of God, the human distaste for loneliness has inappropriately led to the association of this condition with God. In other words, since the Bible teaches that God desires fellowship with man (Gen. 3:8-9), then the question has been raised as to whether, before creation when God was alone, “Was He lonely?”

- (b) The explanation of Shedd is most helpful here:

God as personal, is self-conscious. Consequently he must make himself his own object of contemplation. Here the doctrine of the Trinity, the deep and dark mystery of Christianity, pours a flood of light upon the mystery of the Divine self-consciousness. . . . God cannot be self-contemplating, self-cognitive, and self-communing, unless he is trinal in his constitution.⁷⁶

- (5) In other words, God was blessed, content, self-satisfied before creation because there has always been perfect fellowship between the persons of the Trinity. God has always been happily aware of Himself (Matt. 11:27;

⁷⁵ Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, pp. 319-20.

⁷⁶ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, pp. 183, 251.

John 1:1-2, 18; 17:5). This is especially evident in the Son of God's passionate love for restoration of a preceding intimate relationship with the Father in His very bosom (John 1:18; 17:5, 13). Hence God has satisfying self-knowledge and self-love. Jonathan Edwards describes this in *The Nature of True Virtue*, one of his most important and profound works. We repeat part of an earlier reference made when considering the infinity of God.

[T]he virtue of the divine mind must consist primarily in *love to himself*, or in the mutual love and friendship which subsists eternally and necessarily between the several persons in the Godhead, or that infinitely strong propensity there is in these divine persons one to another. . . . God's goodness and love to created beings, is derived from and subordinate to his love of himself.⁷⁷

(6) Illustrations of the triunity of God.

(a) While Bavinck gives the most comprehensive catalog of illustrations of the Trinity, yet he warns that our knowledge of this doctrine is exclusively obtained from Scripture. On the other hand, to exclude any approximate illustration of the Trinity, for at best approximate is all they are, would be to argue for the exclusion of any illustration of essential Bible truth. Included in this collection are,

the three dimensions of space [height, breadth, depth]; the three measurements of time [past present, future]; the three kingdoms of nature: matter, spirit, and the union of the two in man; the solid, fluid, and gaseous state; the power of attraction, repulsion, and equilibrium; the three functions of the human soul: reasoning, feeling, and desiring; the three capacities of the soul: mind, will, and moral nature; the three factors that constitute a family: husband, wife and child; the three classes in society: teachers, soldiery, and peasantry . . . the three ideals: the good, the true, and the beautiful; the three tones in music: key-tone, tierce-tone, and quint-tone; the rainbow and its many colors; the sun with its quickening, illuminating, and warming energy; the three basic colors: yellow, red, and blue, etc.⁷⁸

Consider also electricity manifesting heat, light, and power. Dagg mentions water, ice, and snow, but then comments in contradiction: "All such illustrations darken counsel with words without knowledge. What shall we liken unto the Lord?"⁷⁹ However, is not nature an illustration of God in part? (Ps. 19:1-6).

⁷⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I, pp. 126-7.

⁷⁸ Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, p. 323.

⁷⁹ John Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, p. 249.

- (b) The most historic illustration of all is the following diagram which represents God as a triangle set in a circle incorporating unity, triune diversity, patriarchal headship, and eternity.



- 1) There is an indivisible oneness of essence that incorporates the distinct persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - 2) There is a triune diversity that distinguishes between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the one indivisible essence of God.
 - 3) There is a headship that portrays the distinct economic role of the Father over the distinct role of the Son and the distinct role of Holy Spirit.
 - 4) There is triune diversity in the unity of one God, which existence is eternal.
- c. The doctrine of the Trinity defended.
- (1) The most crude objection to the doctrine of the Trinity is that of the religious rationalist who agrees that, 1 (God the Father) + 1 (God the Son) + 1 (God the Holy Spirit) = 3 (Gods). But why is this antagonist so selective with this equation since 1 (God the Father) \times 1 (God the Son) \times 1 (God the Holy Spirit) = 1 (God). Of course God cannot be explained by a mere formula anymore than finite man can comprehend the infinite. Surely truth about God in every aspect is supra-rational, that is beyond reason without

being absurd or morally contradictory. Hence Dabney calls this objection an argument based on ignorance. He continues:

But it is not just what we would expect, that when God reveals something about the subsistence of His being, it should be thoroughly inscrutable to us? We must remember that the human mind has no cognizance of substance, in fact, except as the existing ground, to which our intuitions impel us to refer as properties. It is only the properties that we truly conceive. This is true of material substance; how much more of spiritual substance? And more yet of the infinite? God, in revealing Himself to the eternal reason, only reveals His being and properties or attributes – His substance remains as visible as ever. Look back, I pray you, to that whole knowledge of God which we have acquired this far, and you will see that it is nothing but knowledge of attributes.⁸⁰

- (a) It is objected that the title *Son of God* can only mean that Jesus, in both his person and nature, is inferior to the Father, as a creation of the Father, not equal.
- (b) It is agreed that the person of Jesus Christ, existing before creation, has *taken upon himself* a subordinate rank or role, that is, “the form [μορφή, morphē] of a bond-servant” (Phil. 2:7). Hence Jesus Christ can say in this servant role, “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). At the same time, “I and the Father are one.”
 - 1) However, it is also true that before Jesus Christ took upon himself “the likeness [μορφή, morphē] of men,” he “existed in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6-7) in His bosom (John 1:1-2, 18). It is for this reason that Paul can declare of the Son of God that, “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col. 2:9).
 - 2) We must understand that *Fatherhood* originates in heaven “¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,” (Eph. 3:14-15). So *Sonhood* also originates in heaven (Ps. 2:7). It is a grave error to force the figure of human sonship upon the heavenly reality. Hence the role of the Son of God is submission to the Father, while the essence of the Son is identical with the Father (John 1:1).
 - 3) Note also that the Jews of Jesus’ time equated the title “Son of God” with the deity of God when they charged him with

⁸⁰ Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 178.

blasphemy. "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18, cf. 5:23; 10:33; 19:7).

- 4) In Jesus being the Father's "beloved Son, . . . the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:13-15), the language is concerned with rank, not origin. Isaac was not Abraham's firstborn since Esau preceded him, yet we read, " By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son" (Heb. 11:17).
- (2) It is objected that the doctrine of the Trinity is historic, creedal, metaphysical speculation that involves verbal juggling by contentious minds that detracts from true piety.
- (a) It is agreed that, like many other vital Christian truths, the doctrine of the Trinity has suffered at the hands of those who seem to revel in abstract debate and so tend to sterilize vital orthodoxy. However the offering of Unitarianism hardly presents a heart-warming alternative. Pieper pulls no punches in declaring that, the
- pious-sounding phrase of the fatherhood of God is nothing but human speculation and self-delusion. And sooner or later the Unitarians experience that their favorite formula is without spirit and without life, for in spiritual anguish or in the hour of death the voice of conscience, which had been violently suppressed, will no longer be silenced, as the cases of Horace Bushnell, A Ritschl, W. R. Harper, and others prove.⁸¹
- (b) It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the doctrine of the Trinity supremely rests upon the full deity of Jesus Christ. When we passionately hold true to this biblical foundation as we ought, along with the deity of the Father and the Holy Spirit, then there will reverently burst forth from our hearts that cry of Thomas concerning his Lord, so full of authentic worship, "[You are] my Lord and my God!" Literally this reads, "[You are] the Lord of me and the God [ὁ θεός, ho theos] of me" (John 20:28). But further, when we *personally* learn of the saving work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in essential holy harmony, then we will join with Paul (II Thess. 2:13-14) and Peter (I Pet. 1:1-3) to "always give thanks to God."

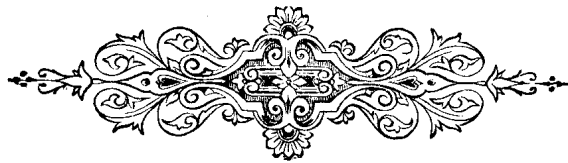
⁸¹ Pieper, *Dogmatics*, I, p, 404.

5. The practical application of the doctrine of the Trinity.
- a. While teaching on the Trinity is rarely heard today, even from evangelical pulpits, yet it is significant that the Church of England has required that all forty-four articles of the Athanasian Creed (c. A.D. 600?), not written by Athenasius, be read each year on Trinity Sunday, which is the Sunday following Pentecost. This confession is prefaced and concluded with the assertion that belief in its expressed truth is necessary to salvation.
 - b. In the fluctuating spiritual climate in evangelical churches today, faithful teaching on the triunity of God will correct the following perversions of fundamental biblical truth.
 - (1) That erroneous “Jesus only” emphasis which excludes the primary passion of the Son of God, namely the will of the Father. “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work’ (John 4:34; cf. Luke 22:42). Refer to Thomas Smail’s *The Forgotten Father*, in which he confesses that much of his loyalty to the Charismatic Movement had to be abandoned on account of its doctrinal imbalance at this point, especially concerning pneumaticism.
 - (2) That deistic posturing of God as the benign, semi-involved, Unitarian Father who also masquerades in Christian churches that vaguely speak of worshiping “God in general,” while qualified patronage is given to the ethical teaching of the human Jesus, the Galilean, and “the vague Spirit(?) at work in the world today.” Liberal Christianity also tends to promote this perspective, especially by means of the denial of the deity of Jesus Christ.
 - (3) That Charismatic pneumaticism which, by means of dominant emphasis upon the Holy Spirit, subtracts from the supreme purpose of the Father’s glory, and dethrones the reigning centrality of Jesus Christ’s atonement, as if Pentecost trumps Calvary. Thus the experience of the baptism and gifts of the Spirit takes precedence over the preliminary matter of redemption.
 - c. Strong concludes that the doctrine of the Trinity regulates other important doctrines.⁸²
 - (1) The Trinity is essential to proper theism and preservation from Mohammedanism, modern Judaism, Unitarianism, and Pantheism. Love is an impossible exercise to a solitary being.

⁸² Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 347-52.

- (2) The Trinity is essential to any proper revelation. No trinity means Christ is not God and cannot perfectly know or reveal God. Hence the knowledge of God by true incarnation, God in the flesh, is denied.
 - (3) The Trinity is essential to any proper redemption. There is no applicable atonement, for only one who is God can reconcile us to God. God as only a unity can judge but not save.
 - (4) The Trinity is essential to any proper model for human life. Godliness is impossible unless the true likeness of God be seen. There must be sympathetic embodiment from heaven for man really to know God.
- d. For Bavinck, the doctrine of the Trinity is vital for practical religion because:

The work of redemption is thoroughly trinitarian in character. Of God, and through God, and in God are all things. It is one divine act from beginning to end. Nevertheless, it reveals a threefold distinction: it is summarized in the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. . . . The *triune* God is the source of every blessing we receive. He is the mainspring of our entire salvation.⁸³



⁸³ Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 333.