

## CHAPTER 2

# OF GOD, AND OF THE HOLY TRINITY

### ***God's absolute and relative attributes***

“1. There is but one only living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.”

There is only one true God (Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4-6, against 1 Cor 10:19-20).

He is spiritual (John 4:24; 1 Tim 1:17), not material (Luke 24:39; Acts 14:11, 15). When the Bible speaks of the “arm of the Lord,” or the “breath of his nostrils,” or “his heart,” it is using the language of human speech, figures of speech that make God’s attitude and actions concrete to us.

Notice these attributes of God:

- Immutable (unchangeable; Jas 1:17)
- Impassible (without passions; Acts 14:11, 15)
- Immense (1 Kgs 8:27; Ps 139)
- Eternal (Ps 90:2)
- Incomprehensible (although we know true things about God, we can never know all there is about God; Ps 145:3)
- Almighty (Rev 4:8)
- Most wise (Rom 16:27)
- Most holy (Isa 6:3)
- Most free (God can do whatever he pleases, but he always acts in accord with his own nature; he knows no outside constraint; Ps 115:3)
- Most absolute (God is totally self-sufficient; Exod 3:14)

These attributes God possesses in and of himself; they would all be true and exercised even if he never had created the universe. Therefore, they often are called absolute attributes. The

following qualities or attributes of God are seen in his dealings with his creation, and therefore are called relative attributes:

- God works all things . . .
  - According to his own will (Eph 1:11; Ps 145:17)
  - For his own glory (Rom 11:36; Prov 16:4)
- As God controls all things, he manifests these attributes:
  - Most loving (1 John 4:8, 16)
  - Gracious, merciful, longsuffering (Exod 34:6)
  - Abundant in goodness and truth (Exod 34:6)
  - Forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin (Exod 34:7)
  - Rewarding those who seek him (Heb 11:6)
  - Most just and terrible in judgment (Neh 9:32-33)
  - Hating all sin (Ps. 5:5-6; Hab 1:13)
  - Not clearing the guilty (Exod 34:7)

### ***God's relation to his creation***

“2. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them: he is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, he is pleased to require of them.”

God is self-sufficient. He does not need us; we need him. God in himself has life (John 5:26), goodness (Ps 119:68), glory (Acts 7:2), and blessedness or joy (Rom 9:5).

While we were created for his glory, we do not add to his glory, but rather provide occasions for God to show his glory (Job 22:2-3).

Since God has created us, he can do as he pleases with us (Rev 4:11; Dan 4:35). God's knowledge of his creation is described in these terms:

- Infinite (Ps 147:5)
- Infallible (Ezek 11:5; Heb 4:13)
- Independent (he does not have to wait to see what we will do; Acts 15:18; Isa 46:10)

The Lord is holy in everything he does concerning his creation, including us (Ps 145:17). He is never “unfair,” neither in how he treats us nor in what he expects from us.

Worship, service, and obedience are due to him from all his rational creation. It is due from angels, from us human beings, and from any other creature capable of it. Such a scene of worship and obedience is found in the last book of the Bible (Rev 5:12-14).

### ***God's unity and trinity***

“3. 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.”

The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God (Deut 6:4). But the Bible also teaches that there are three persons within that one Godhead.

- The OT has indications that there is more than one person in the Godhead:
  - Several times the OT uses the plural for God (Gen 1:26; Isa 6:8).
  - Some see in the threefold “holy” in Isaiah 6:3 a hint of the three persons of the Trinity.
  - Prov 30:4 distinguishes God and his “son.”
  - The OT distinguishes the Messiah to come from the Father as two separate persons (Isa 42:1-4; Dan 7:9-14), and yet it considers the Messiah also to be God (Isa 9:6; Jer 23:6, “Yahweh”).
- The NT expands and clarifies the teaching of the Trinity:
  - It places the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit on the same level (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14).
  - It declares that the **Father** is God (Rom 1:7; admitted by all)
  - It declares that the **Son** is God (following the outline of WLC 11):
    - His names and titles (John 1:1; Rom 9:5; Heb 1:8; 1 John 5:20; Rev 1:8)
    - His attributes:
      - Eternity (John 8:58; 17:5)
      - Immutability (Heb 1:10-11)
      - Omnipresence (Matt 18:20)

- Omniscience (Matt 11:27; Rev. 2:23)
- Omnipotence (Heb 1:3)
- His works:
  - Creation (John 1:3, 10; Col 1:16-17)
  - Preservation of creation (Heb 1:3)
  - Final judgment (Matt 7:21-23; John 5:22, 27; 2 Cor 5:10)
  - Sending the Holy Spirit (John 16:7)
  - Sanctification (Eph 5:25-27)
  - Raising the dead (John 6:39-40, 44)
  - Giving eternal life (John 10:28)
- His receiving worship (John 9:38; Heb 1:6; compare Rev 19:10)

[for an excellent defense of the divinity of Christ against the Unitarians, see Edward Henry Bickersteth, *The Trinity*]

- It declares that the **Holy Spirit** is God
  - His being called God (Isa 6:8-9 [Acts 28:25-26]; Acts 5:3-4)
  - His attributes:
    - Omniscience (1 Cor 2:10-11)
    - Omnipresence (Ps 139:7)
    - Omnipotence (Luke 1:35)
  - His works:
    - Creation (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13)
    - Miracles (1 Cor 12:9-11)
    - Regeneration (John 3:6)
    - Inspiration of prophets and the Scripture (2 Pet 1:21)
  - His honor (Matt 12:31-32; 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14)

It is important to realize that there are three persons in the Trinity, each of whom is God—one God in three persons. These persons are distinct from each other. Each one can say “I” and can call one of the other persons “you.” At the baptism of Jesus all three persons came together in a way that people could observe (Matt 3:16-17).

It is not a good idea to use 1 John 5:7 in the KJV for proof of the Trinity, since that verse is not found in the Greek original. But another verse is good to use—Isa 48:16, which mentions all three persons (the “I” is the Messiah; see v. 12)

While the three persons are “of one substance, power, and eternity,” and are “equal in power and glory” (WSC 6), they each fulfill a special place in God’s purposes.

- The Father is the originator of will; he is pictured as making the decisions which the other two persons follow.
- The Son is the revealer of the Godhead, the one who puts the Father’s plan into action.
- The Holy Spirit is often called “the silent member of the Trinity.” He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and does their will in the affairs and hearts of people.

This division of office is seen clearly in our salvation. The Father elects us from all eternity (Eph 1:3-5); the Son purchases this salvation in obedience to his Father’s will (Eph 1:7); and the Holy Spirit moves our hearts and wills to receive this salvation (Eph 1:13-18). This hierarchy of office in the Godhead is a model for human institutions like the family, the state, and the church. The fact that one person obeys another does not mean that the two persons are unequal in value or importance in God’s sight.