

KNOW THE TRUTH

Lesson 3 - The Doctrine of God (1 of 2)

Outline is drawn from pages 67-94 of *Know the Truth - A Handbook of Christian Belief* by Bruce Milne.

KEY CONCEPTS FROM CHAPTER 4 - THE BEING OF GOD

- I. The Grounds for Christian Theism
 - A. "The basis of our belief in God has in principle been given in Part 1: God has **revealed** himself to us." (p. 67)
 - B. "The Bible offers no rational demonstration of God's existence, but rather points to his unquestionable **reality**." (p. 67)
 - C. "Humankind's intuitive awareness of God is broadly confirmed by social anthropology, which recognizes a virtually **universal** religious consciousness." (p. 67)
- II. The Rational 'Proofs' of God's Existence
 - A. Over the centuries many Christian thinkers have tried to '**prove**' the existence of God from factors within the world. This is known as '**natural** theology'.
 - B. The main 'proofs' are the following:
 1. **Cosmological**
 2. **Teleological**
 3. **Ontological**
 4. **Moral**
 5. **Mental**
 6. **Prophetic**
 7. **Christological**
- III. Presuppositional Apologetics
 - A. "One area where evangelical thought has advanced in recent years is its attempt to move the **debate** with non-Christian thinkers and truth systems away from questions about the validity of Christian claims, to the non-viability and inconsistency of non-Christian positions." (p. 75)
- IV. Evaluating the Rational Approach
- V. A Few Final Comments

KEY CONCEPTS FROM CHAPTER 5 - GOD THE HOLY TRINITY

- I. What is God like?
 - A. "A general provisional answer is 'God is a living personal **Spirit**'. The God of the Bible is emphatically a living God who does things (Pss. 97:7; 115:3f.). He is not an impersonal power or energy, but a personal God with a distinct character and nature. He is a Spirit who transcends the entire world order, though that order depends totally on him." (p. 79).
- II. The biblical basis
 - A. Old Testament
 1. "For Israel the fundamental **unity** of God is an axiom: 'Hear O Israel: the LORD our God is one' (Deut. 6:4)." (p. 79)
 2. "The OT, however, contains intimations of a '**fullness**' in the Godhead which foreshadow NT trinitarian teaching." (p. 79)
 - a) "First, there are the occasions where God refers to himself in **plural** terms (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8)..." (p. 80)
 - b) "Then there are references to the Angel of the LORD who is identified with, yet **distinct** from, God (Exod. 3:2-6; Judg. 13:2-22)". (p. 80)
 - c) "The OT also refers to the **Spirit** of God as God's personal agent (Gen. 1:2; Neh. 9:20; Ps. 139:7; Isa. 63:10-14)." (p. 80)
 - d) "[The Old Testament] speaks of the wisdom of God, particularly in Proverbs 8, as a **personalized** outgoing of God to the world, and of the Word of God, the creative utterance of God (Ps. 33:6, 9; cf. Gen. 1:26)." (p. 80)

- e) "There are also prophecies which identify the long-awaited **Messiah** with God (Pss. 2; 110; Isa. 9:6f.)." (p. 80)
- B. New Testament
 - 1. "The teaching **latent** [existing but not yet developed] in the OT comes to the surface in the NT." (p. 80)
 - a) "First, in coming to terms with the impact of Jesus' life and character, claims and miracles, and above all his resurrection and ascension, the apostles found themselves increasingly led to **worship** him as God." (p. 80)
 - b) "Secondly, the reality and activity of the Holy Spirit among them was clearly the presence of God himself. Hence the trinitarian mould given them by Jesus (Matt. 28:19) determined their own understanding. God the Lord was one, yet distinguishable as **three**: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit." (p. 80)
 - c) "Several NT passages presuppose, imply or state God's **triunity** (Matt. 3:13–17; 28:19; John 14:15–23; Acts 2:32f.; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:1–14; 3:16–19)." (p. 80)
 - d) "Each person of the Godhead is asserted to be divine." (p. 80)
 - (1) The **Father** is God (Matt. 6:8f.; 7:21; Gal. 1:1).
 - (2) "The **Son** is God (John 1:1–18; Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8–10)." (p. 80)
 - e) "The Bible thus presents this unique and **mysterious** reality: one God, Father, Son and Spirit." (p. 80).
 - f) "One way of understanding the distinctions between Father, Son and Spirit is to refer different **functions** to each." (p. 80)
 - g) "These distinctions, however, must not obscure the fundamental truth of the divine **unity** whereby all three are involved in the activity of any one, e.g. while creation may be particularly assigned to the Father (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11), it can equally be associated with the Son (John 1:3) and the Spirit (Isa. 40:13)." (p. 81)
- III. Understanding the doctrine
 - A. The Limits of **Language**
 - B. Three What?
 - C. Analogy?
- IV. The Importance of the Doctrine
 - A. "Such complexities may tempt us to question the value of raising these issues at all, especially in face of the sheer conundrum of 'one plus one plus one equals one'." (p. 82)
 - B. In fact, however, just about everything that matters in Christianity hangs on the truth of God's three-in-oneness." (p. 82)
 - C. "The entire fabric of Christian **redemption** and its **application** to human experience depend wholly on the three-in-oneness of God. The Trinity is as important as that." (p. 83)

KEY CONCEPTS FROM CHAPTER 6 - THE ATTRIBUTES OR PERFECTIONS OF GOD

- I. The **Glor** of God
 - A. "'Glor' is a familiar biblical term, normally conveying the visible manifestation of God's being. His glory carries us to the heart of all that is essential to his being as God, his divine majesty, his sheer Godness. A parallel term is '**transcendence**', which refers to God's 'going beyond' all finite reality." (p. 85)
 - B. "God's glory is manifest in all three persons of the Godhead:
 - 1. The glory of the **Father**: 'Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father,' writes Paul (Rom. 6:4)...
 - 2. The glory of the **Son**: 'We have seen his glory,' writes John, 'the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father' (John 1:14)...
 - 3. The glory of the **Spirit**: 'The Spirit of glory...rests on you,' writes Peter (1 Pet. 4:14)." (p. 85)
 - C. "This perfection may serve as a summary term for several other aspects. God's glory implies:

1. The **infinity** of God: he is without limitation. He 'lives in unapproachable light' (1 Tim. 6:16), a God of 'unsearchable judgments' whose paths are 'beyond tracing out' (Rom. 11:33).
 2. The **self-existence** of God: he depends on nothing else. 'In the beginning God...' (Gen. 1:1); 'as if he needed anything' (Acts 17:25; cf. Isa. 40:13f.).
 3. The **immutability** of God: he is always consistent. 'I the LORD do not change' (Mal. 3:6); 'the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows' (Jas 1:17); 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever' (Heb. 13:8). 'The fruit of the Spirit is...faithfulness' (Gal. 5:22), the quality reflecting the Spirit's inner nature. God's changelessness is expressed in his faithfulness and dependability in his relationships with his people. The whole idea of the covenant is based on this perfection." (pp. 85-86)
- II. The **Lordship** of God
- A. "Once again it is crucial to understand this perfection of God's lordship in trinitarian terms. Thus:
 1. The **Father** is Lord: 'we praise our Lord and Father,' writes James (Jas 3:9)...
 2. The **Son** is Lord: '[God] brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ,' says the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 13:20)...
 3. The **Spirit** is Lord: 'the Lord is the Spirit,' writes Paul (2 Cor. 3:17)." (p. 87)
 - B. "God's lordship is expressed in three related perfections:
 1. The **omnipotence** of God: he is all-powerful...
 2. The **omnipresence** of God: he is everywhere present...
 3. The **omniscience** of God: God is all-knowing..." (pp. 87-88)
- III. The **holiness** of God
- A. "Referred to God, it carries two implications, neither of which should be neglected. They belong together." (p. 89)
 1. "God is **separate** from all other beings; he alone is God. In this sense God's holiness is akin to his glory." (p. 89)
 2. "The holiness of God is an **ethical** notion referring to God's separation of himself from all that resists and opposes him. 'Holiness is that attribute in virtue of which God makes himself the absolute standard of himself' (Godet). This is the basis of all moral distinctions." (p. 89)
 - B. "Once more we need to underline the relationship of this perfection to the wholeness of God as Trinity:
 1. The **Father** is holy: 'Holy Father, protect them,' prayed Jesus (John 17:11)...
 2. The **Son** is holy: 'you will not...let your Holy One see decay,' proclaimed Peter of Jesus (Acts 2:27; Ps. 16:10)
 3. The **Spirit** is holy: 'God...gives you his Holy Spirit,' writes Paul (1 Thess. 4:8)." (pp. 90-91)
 - C. Four related terms should be noted
 1. "God's **righteousness**. This refers to his 'holy' conformity with himself; in the OT it is interpreted by his relationship with his creation (Ps. 145:17), and with his people (Ps. 31:1; Jer. 11:20)." (p. 91)
 2. "God's **justice**. This refers to his holy will in operation (Deut. 32:4; 1 John 1:9; Rev. 15:3)." (p. 91)
 3. "God's **wrath**. This arises from his eternal self-consistency. His revealed character is an unalterable expression of his nature. All that opposes him he resists with a total and final commitment. 'Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness' (J. Murray)." (p. 91)
 4. "God's **goodness**. This is a perfection which can be classified equally under holiness or love, and as such underlines the impossibility of separating these two attributes (Exod. 33:19; 1 Kgs 8:66; Ps. 34:8; Rom. 2:4). (p. 92)"
- IV. The love of God
- A. Introductory Remarks

1. "'God is **love**' (1 John 4:8) is the best-known biblical definition of God. It is not the only one, of course. John himself balances this affirmation: 'God is light' (1 John 1:5), an important qualifier since in human contexts love covers a considerable variety of attitudes and actions. What is eliminated by the apostle is the idea of God as a super-indulgent divine parent. God's love is never morally indiscriminating; his love never eliminates his holiness.'" (92)
- B. "But the love of the three persons is not simply expressed internally within their own mutual relations, but spills over into a trinitarian love for God's human creatures. Thus:
 1. The **Father** is love: 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,' writes John (John 3:16)...
 2. The **Son** is love: 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,' cries out Paul (Gal. 2:20)...
 3. The **Spirit** is love: 'I urge you by the love of the Spirit,' says Paul again (Rom. 15:30).'" (p. 92)