

1. **Introduction:** Our first task will be seeking to understand the Trinity and Incarnation
 - John Calvin in Book 1, Chapter 1 of the **Institutes of the Christian Religion** says that “Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: The knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.”
 - Calvin believed it was not clear which aspect comes first. He said, an accurate assessment of self should create amazement at the wonder and intricacy of the human mind and body, an amazement that carries the conviction there is a God.
 - That assessment will also reveal a personal lack of perfection in thought and action. In other words, we discover that although we are amazingly made, we don’t live up to our created potential. Why?
 - As the Apostle Paul asked, who can help us find the perfection we crave and were intended to have and eliminate faults we have but despise.
2. **Seeing Ourselves Clearly:** We cannot see ourselves accurately unless we understand a great deal about God and our relationship to Him. We tend to create our own vision of “good” and judge everything based on that vision. Is our vision of “the good” correct?
 - Who has authority to set the standards for determining what is good and bad? God’s character is the standard of good for Christians. God’s character is revealed in Scripture.
3. **Phenomenological Language:** To simplify understanding, Scripture uses language that describes things as a human on earth would perceive them.
 - For example, people say, the sun “rises in the East and sets in the West.” The Bible uses that kind of phenomenological language. Though we now know it is earth’s rotation that causes the sun to appear to move from east to west, we still use the familiar language.
 - To enable us to have some understanding of high degrees of complexity, God’s words and thoughts are transposed into human language resulting in a kind of “baby talk.”
 - Complex concepts are simplified to fit human understanding. Metaphors and other figures of speech help in understanding but require careful interpretation.
 - God’s thoughts and mental capability are incredibly higher than ours.
 - To help in understanding theological concepts about God, a few words must be carefully defined. For now, we will consider two key words – nature & person.
4. **Definition of a Nature:** In Doctrine, the word “nature” has a precise meaning.
 - All things that exist have qualities, some essential, some nonessential. All physical things and living creatures have a nature.
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5. **Definition of a Nature:** In Doctrine, the word “nature” has a precise meaning.
- All things that exist have qualities, some essential, some nonessential. All physical things, and living creatures have a nature.
 - A nature is all of a thing’s or creature’s essential qualities.
 - Changing even one essential quality creates something different.
 - Consider a 2-inch diameter iron pipe 3-feet long, painted white. As determined by its essential qualities, an iron bar’s nature is iron, length, and hollowness.
 - Change one essential quality, and the iron bar becomes something else.
 - Dimensions, weight, and color are nonessentials. If changed, it remains an iron pipe.
 - Remove an iron pipe’s hollowness by flattening it and it is converted into an iron bar.
 - Compress it into a hollow flat disk and it becomes an iron washer.
 - Our definition of a “nature” applies to both physical and non-physical things. It is useful in identifying the nature of God, angels, people, and physical things.
 - Angels and humans are distinguished from one another by differences in their essential qualities. They possess related but different natures.
6. **Definition of Person:** A person is a nature plus a center of self-awareness.
- Persons possess an “I” to the “You” of other persons. We know of 3 categories of persons, namely, God, angels, and humans. Persons possess a self-aware center of consciousness.
 - Persons have capabilities, some of which are common to all 3 categories of persons, including cognition (mental action of acquiring knowledge), rationality, volition, desire, perception morality, and a capacity for relationships.
 - Capacity limits capability. Capacity for a capability is much like seeds in that, with proper care and nourishment, both can grow and expand.
 - Angels and humans are distinguished from one another by differences in their essential qualities. They possess related but different natures.
 - As a baby grows to be a mature adult, they increase in capacity for language growing to a capability for understanding thousands of words.
 - God has an infinite number of infinite capacities. Human babies begin life with a substantial number of capacities that will be manifested as they mature.
 - Persons may be spirit only or a material/spirit combination. There are no material-only persons. To be a person, there must be a center of self-awareness (identity), a conscious “I” that says “You” to others.
 - A person’s “center of identity,” the “I” controls and utilizes their nature. The “I” is the owner, possessor, and master of the nature. The “I” is the subject who lives, thinks, wills, and acts through their nature.

- A person's "I" acts something like a "mission control center" directing the use of the person's nature's attributes.
7. **God is Creator.** We are created (Is. 45:12). God is holy (Is. 6:3). We are sinners (Rm. 3:23).
- Because of these and many other differences, we are not capable of completely understanding God (Is. 55:8-9; Rm. 11:34).
 - God has graciously revealed a great deal in Scripture about His nature and attributes.
 - God's general revelation through creation and conscience reveals enough about Him to leave people without an excuse concerning God's existence or our guilt.
 - Through the special revelation of His inspired Word, God has revealed much more about His nature and ways and how He has and will deal with us.
8. **The Westminster Confession of Faith** provides excellent, reliable information. Consider the two paragraphs from the Confession shown below.
- **God's Nature in WCF (2:1):** *"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."*
 - **God's Person in WCF (2:3):** *"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."*
9. **God's Nature and Person:** Every human being is one in nature and one in person. Scripture reveals God is quite different. God is one in nature but three in person.
- While that may seem strange to us, our definitions of nature and person show that it is not a contradiction for a being to be one in nature, and three in person.
 - Although the word Trinity is not in Scripture, the concept is and can be deduced from Dt. 6:4-5; Jn. 1:1; Rm 9:5; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13; Acts 5:3-4; Mt. 28:29)
 - Terms and categories used for describing God's nature and attributes may be beyond our complete understanding (like the Trinity) or beyond our experience (like self-existence).
 - We are capable both of knowing God and knowing about God but cannot fully comprehend Him. He is infinite (Psalm 93:2); we are finite (1 Peter 1:24).
 - The finite cannot fully comprehend the infinite. So, it is said that God is incomprehensible (cannot be fully known), but not unknowable. God is a great mystery. We know about Him only what He reveals.
 - Terms and categories used to describe God are sometimes beyond both our complete understanding (like Trinity) and our experience (like self-existence).

- Moses at the burning bush asked God what name he should use to explain to the Israelites who sent him to them. God said tell them “I AM” sent you (Ex. 3:14).
 - “I AM” refers to God’s eternal, self-existing, self-sustaining nature (Ps. 90:2; Is. 40:28; Jn. 5:26; Acts 17:25). God created the universe and all that is in it.
 - God is a most pure living spirit whose nature includes all God’s essential attributes and properties. God’s nature includes self-existence, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.
10. **The Trinity/Nature and Persons:** God’s nature (or essence) is pure spirit. God is Triune, an undivided divine essence (nature) within which there are three individual subsistences (Persons) each being a center of consciousness with a source of “I.”
- Each Person’s attributes are determined by the “one divine essence.” Again, the divine nature belongs fully to each Person. Each Person is fully God.
 - Each person of the Trinity has a center of self-awareness, an identity or “I” distinguishing them from the “You” of the other two Persons. The Trinity is called the “Godhead.”
 - From the law of noncontradiction, we know God cannot be three in Person and one in essence at the same time in the same relationship. But, since God is not three in the same way He is one, there is no contradiction.
 - The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished from one another by a difference in “properties and relationship,” not by a difference in essence or attributes. Is it possible the 3 Persons could be separated?
 - WCF says the Persons of the Trinity are distinguished from one another by “*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.*”
11. **More About the Trinity:** God is a most pure living spirit whose nature (essence) includes all the essential attributes and properties characterizing the Godhead.
- The Godhead engages in both internal and external actions. We know almost nothing about internal interactions. We know the 3 love one another, mutually indwell one another, and that each One is omniscient, omnipotent, etc.
 - In general, all 3 Persons are involved in any external actions.
 - The Bible says God’s nature as holy. He is morally pure, without sin. The very meaning of morally pure is defined by God’s nature. Sin is anything opposing God’s character. God can neither sin nor cause anyone to sin (James 1:13).
 - Sin is a direct contradiction of God’s character which defines His moral law (Ps. 51:4; Jn. 3:4). God can neither sin (directly oppose His own character) or cause anyone to sin (James 1:13) which indirectly opposes His character.
12. **God is Sovereign:** The Bible describes God’s nature as sovereign, merciful, gracious, patient, loving, faithful, forgiving, and just. **Ex. 34:6-7:** “*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,*

visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

- God is sovereign in all things in all ways. He has controlling power over all living creatures and physical things.
- We owe Him complete submission and obedience. Because we are all sinners, we violate that requirement. As we live, we accumulate penalties for our disobedience.
- We are not sovereign. When we plan to do something, we need to take that into account.
- About planned actions, James 4 says, *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."*
- Only God can save us from temporal and eternal consequences of our sins. In spite of our disobedience, He has great love for us and graciously saves us.

13. **What we Learned Tonight:** The key thing we learned tonight is that the one true God is a Trinity of Persons. The Trinity involves no contradictions. The Trinity makes sense. While not contradictory, the details of its nature and the actions and interactions of the 3 Persons are a mystery that is not completely understandable by humans. Yet, the Trinity is the basis for everything, the beginning and end of all creation.

- To grasp how God can be One in being and nature (essence) yet three in person (subsistence) requires carefully distinguishing between "being" and "person."
- Being is established by a nature. A person is established "in a nature" by one or more self-aware consciousnesses that establish identity ("I's").
- Understanding biblical concepts often requires careful precise definitions of key terms.
- To grasp how God can be One in being and nature (essence) yet three in person (subsistence) requires carefully distinguishing between "beings" and "persons."
- "Being" is established by a nature. "Person" is established in a nature by one or more self-aware consciousnesses establishing identity ("I").
- Next lesson we will consider the incarnation. How can we understand one person who has two distinct, noninteracting natures, one of which is divine.