



What We Believe

Article 1 of 13: The Tri-une God – Part 1

With this article we are launching a series of expositions of the 13 sections of our CrossLife Community Church statement of faith. Over the next months, our goal will be to elaborate on what we believe from Scripture in an informative and edifying way. May God be pleased stir us in our devotion and worship of Him through these studies.

Some Brief Thoughts on the Subject of Statements of Faith

Statements of faith, creeds and confessions are very important documents as they summarize the consensus beliefs of the local congregations that hold them. Bible believers, and especially Baptists, are known for their tradition of holding to doctrinal statements and confessions.

Gregory A. Wills, Associate Professor of Church History at the So. Baptist Theological Seminary wrote,

“Baptists have adopted creeds [and confessions] throughout their history. They probably have adopted creeds [and confessions] more than any other denomination. Baptist churches by the tens of thousands adopted a confession of faith when they constituted as a church. Some thousands of Baptist associations have similarly adopted their own confessions.”

“Creeds promote unity and strength of conviction as believers test them before the bar of Scripture. The only question is whether it is a good creed or a bad one. It is a good one to the extent that it agrees with Scripture. A creed has authority only to the extent that it is true, which is merely to say that Scripture is our authority.”

Gregory A. Wills, *The Southern Seminary Magazine*, November 2000 (Volume 68, Number 4), pages 13-15

In our times, and with the modern pragmatic approaches to doing church, many churches hesitate to publicize their beliefs, fearing they might possibly scare newcomers away. This is a sad thing, because many are more concerned with perceptions or growth in numbers than with truth. If they publish a statement of faith at all many times it is a simplistic one. Some say “doctrine divides, but love edifies”, but if we would be like the noble Bereans, Scriptural doctrine will help unify us and love will still edify us.

At CrossLife Community Church, we are truly fortunate by God’s grace to have a very good, theologically sound statement of faith. It summarizes the essential and central areas of our beliefs in a clear and meaningful way, preserving the great truths that connect us to our forefathers in the faith, the teaching of Christ and the Apostle’s Doctrine.

The Tri-une God - Part One

The following is the first article of our statement of faith and it is packed full with deep insights about the existence, being, nature and character of our Tri-une God, Creator and Savior. What a magnificent God we serve!

“**The Tri-une God:** We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in His love and in His holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, He perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about His eternal good purposes to redeem a people for Himself and restore His fallen creation, to the praise of His glorious grace.”

In the following pages we hope to attempt the near impossible. That is, we want to attempt to elaborate on the great truths of the Doctrine of God in an understandable, edifying, but concise manner. In order to do so, it might be helpful to rearrange these truths also known as “Theology Proper”, in a systematic way.

Let’s proceed then in part one of Our Tri-une God with:

The Existence of God, the Nature of God, the Character/Attributes and the Names of God.

Next month, in part two we will study the Tri-unity of God, the Doctrine of the Trinity in more detail.

1. The Existence of God

As we approach the topic of the existence and being of our Tri-une God, as Bible believing Christians studying our statement of faith, we must start where Scripture starts, in Genesis 1:1.

In the beginning God!

Although there are various philosophical arguments for the existence of God, we whole-heartedly accept and trust the straight forward declarations of Scripture. We will look at the doctrine of Scripture in greater detail soon, but just a few words here. At CrossLife, we believe in the full Inspiration and textual reliability of all 66 books of the Bible. Since Scripture is God’s Word it is authoritative and trustworthy for our understanding of doctrine, and very importantly it must be the basis of our statement of faith.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:16.

The existence of God is essential to all being!

The existence of God is essential! Without God nothing else could exist! His being is essential to all being. Scripture treats the existence of God as a presupposition and as a fact, that is, it is assumed from the very start. In the beginning God! That is before anything else was, God was.

Has anyone ever asked you, “Where did God come from?” or “Who made God?” How did you answer?

Our Tri-une God is eternal. He always has been.

He is self-existent, with no beginning and no end.

Now, we are not saying by this that God is self-created or self-caused as this would be irrational.

For example, how could someone create himself before he even exists? Impossible!

What we are saying is that God is self-existent. This is known as the Aseity of God.

In the Bible we have true and reliable “documentary evidence” of the existence of God.

Scripture teaches us as a matter of fact that the existence of God is revealed in nature.

“The heavens tell of the glory of God and the firmament declares His handiwork” Ps. 19:1-2

“What can be known about God is plain to them, ... God has shown it to them...” Rom. 1:18-20

The Scriptures teach the fact of God’s existence as having been revealed to the human conscience.

Humanity was created in the image of God. Genesis 1:27

“For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” Romans 1:21-23

There is an innate sense of the reality of God inscribed in the human conscience. This testimony, however, is stubbornly suppressed in the lost because of their sinful anti-God bias, known as human depravity. The Psalmist wrote that it is the fool who says in his heart there is no God, Ps. 14:1; 53:1.

The truth is, the lost really do know God (or know of God) in some sense, but they suppress that truth in unrighteousness, Romans 1:18.

Theologian Wayne Grudem wrote,

“It must be remembered that in this sinful world God must enable us to be persuaded or we would never believe in Him. We read that ‘the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. 2 Cor. 4:4 . . . In this sinful

world, human wisdom is inadequate for coming to know God. . . . We are dependent upon God to remove the blindness and irrationality caused by sin and to enable us to evaluate the evidence rightly, believe what the Scriptures say, and come to saving faith in Christ.”

Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, page 144

Scripture testifies to the existence of God in that He appeared to or communicated directly with certain individuals.

The LORD spoke and appeared to our first parents Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28, 29; 2:16; 3:8-19.

He spoke to Cain in Genesis 4:9-16.

He spoke to Noah in Gen. 6:13-22; 7:1-5; 9:1ff.

He appeared to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-18; 15; 17; 18; 22.

God appeared to Jacob in Gen. 32:22-32, 35:1, 9, 10; 46:2; 48:3.

God appeared and spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:2-6, 13-15 and 4:4, 30; 6:2, 13, 28.

God demonstrated His sovereign power in answer to Elijah’s prayer in 1Kings 18:36-39.

God also revealed Himself to Hagar - Genesis 16:13;

The LORD spoke to Samuel - 1 Samuel 16:1; to King David – 2 Chronicle 3:1; and to the prophets.

God as Creator

Just as Scripture declares and treats the existence of God as a fact, Genesis chapters one and two declare as a matter of fact that God is the Creator of the heavens and earth and all there in.

Scripture also reveals how God created. He sovereignly spoke the whole universe into being, Psalm 33:6, 9. This is known as creation “ex nihilo”, Latin meaning “out of nothing.”

Repeatedly in Genesis chapter 1 we read the words,

“And God said, Let there be .. and it was so”, and God saw that everything was good.

We can be very confident in the reliability of the Genesis account as divinely inspired documentary evidence of the special creation by God of the universe. Critics, many of whom are in the modern scientific and academic communities seek to explain it away as unscientific, ancient mythology or poetry. However, we must remember that science is limited in scope to the natural and physical realm and the Scientific Method is not the only means of validating evidence. Creation and human origins are the supernatural acts of God and are ultimately issues of history. Documentary evidence such as is given to us in the Bible functions very well in the verification of historical matters. To the unbelieving in the scientific community and elsewhere the Scripture asks the following question,

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 40:28

The Genesis account is an inspired, truthful, ancient Hebrew historical narrative of creation.

Jesus referred to the first chapters of Genesis as true history during His ministry. Mark 10:6; 13:19

His words are authoritative for us as His disciples. Jesus is truth incarnate.

All things, visible and invisible were created through Him and for Him. John 1:3; Colossians 1:16

Our Creator God is the source of all being and life.

God as Sustainer

God by nature is transcendent and superior to His creation, but He is also intricately involved with it sustaining and preserving it and all life. Scripture tells us:

“...in Him we live and move and have our being.” Acts 17:24-28

“He upholds the universe by the word of his power.” Hebrews 1:3

God as Redeemer

In Scripture the unfolding saga of “Creation, Fall, Redemption” is revealed to us. This is a major motif in the Bible. God’s finished creation was pristine and phenomenal. The LORD saw that it was good. Tragically, in the fall, humanity was plunged into sin and death and the creation was dragged down into a fallen state also. But God, rich in His saving love and mercies proactively secured the redemption of a people for His name and will ultimately restore creation.

God is the only Redeemer and Savior.

“I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior”. Isaiah 43:11

Also see Isaiah 44:6; Hosea 13:4; Romans 8:19-23; 1 Timothy 4:10; Titus 2:13

2. Nature of God

Having addressed the existence of God let us turn now to the nature of God. As we consider the nature of God we will look at those truths essential to His essence and being.

God is One

Just as boldly as the Bible declares that God exists, it also declares that God is One! The Unity of the being and essence of God is essential to Monotheism. In Deuteronomy God taught His ancient people the “Shema” (Hebrew - to hear) which was a fundamental creed of ancient Israel.

Moses declared,

“Hear Oh Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD is one.” Deuteronomy 6:4

See also Isaiah 44:6; 45:5-6; Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Timothy 2:5

Our God is the one true and living God!

God is Tri-une

We will address this magnificent Biblical truth in the next issue, but in passing we must say that the Tri-unity of God is an essential truth of the Doctrine of God.

God is Spirit

Scripture teaches us that God is spirit as to His essential nature. He is not limited to a particular spatial location. Grudem writes,

“We should not think of God as having size or dimensions . . . no place in the universe can contain Him or surround Him. . . God’s being cannot be rightly thought of in terms of space .”

Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, page 187.

“God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” Psalm 139:7

God is Personal

Scripture testifies that our God is a Personal Being. He senses, reasons, He has emotion, He has volition and relationships.

God thinks and knows – 1 Samuel 2:3; 1 Chronicles 28:9; 1 John 3:20.

God has a will, plans, foreordains and brings to pass – Isaiah 14:26; 46:10; Ephesians 3:10, 11.

He makes moral and ethical judgments – Proverbs 5:21; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:16.

He senses and shows emotion – Genesis 6:6; Exodus 20:5, 6; Psalm 5:5; James 5:11; 1 John 4:16.

He relates to other beings – Exodus 3:7, 8; Psalm 91:14; Philippians 4:6, 7.

God is Eternal

God is not limited regarding time. Scripture teaches us that God is eternal, that He has always been and will always be. As we noted above, this is an essential truth. If God were not eternal He would not exist and if He did not exist nothing else could exist. God is called eternal in Deuteronomy 33:27 and Psalm 93:2.

It is important to understand this as related to the future aspect of eternity also. If God should cease to exist, nothing likewise could continue to exist. Again, it is in Him that we live and move and have our being. Acts 17:24-28. Also see Psalm 45:6; 48:14; Isaiah 26:4; Romans 1:20; 1 Timothy 1:17

The Glory of God

Our God, being perfect and holy, is extremely concerned for His own glory. The Hebrew word for Glory, “kabowd” can mean honor, splendor, and reputation. The Greek word for glory, “doxa” can mean honor, splendor, magnificence, preeminence, a kingly majesty as supreme ruler.

Nature declares the glory of God in Psalm 19:1,2. Isaiah 42:8 says God will not share His glory with anyone, He alone is to be worshipped. Also see Exodus 16:10; 24:17; 40:35; Isaiah 35:2; Romans 1:24.

God is Transcendent

The Bible teaches us that God by nature is superior and exalted above His creation. As Christians we can never say, “God is all and all is God” this is Pantheism, that God is synonymous with the material universe. Or “God is in everything”, this is Panentheism, that God interpenetrates every part of nature.

No, our God is holy, separate and above His creation by nature.

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands . . .” Acts 17:24, 25.

Also see Isaiah 55:8, 9.

God is Immanent

Although God is transcendent in His nature, He is immanent in His presence. That is, He is near to and involved with His creation. Unlike Deism, which basically says that God created the universe, but then left it to itself, the God of Christian Theism is a God who is near and intimately involved in His creation, and is involved in the lives of His people.

“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him?” Deuteronomy 4:7. Also see Isaiah 57:15 and Acts 17:28.

God is Knowable

The Scriptures teach us that God is knowable intellectually and relationally. Since God has revealed Himself in nature, in the human conscience and in Scripture as we have shown, we can know about Him to the extent He has revealed Himself. However, as finite humans we cannot know all there is to know about Him. How can a finite person completely understand an infinite Person?

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. “ Ps.145:3

Also see Job 11:7-9 and Romans 11:33.

There is also a very important relational aspect to God’s being knowable! We can see this by the Biblical words used for knowing God. The Hebrew and Greek words “to know”, “yada” and “ginosko” speak of knowing someone personally. By God’s grace, as His people we know Him specially and intimately!

We are the objects of His sovereign redeeming love! In the New Covenant, the LORD promises us that we shall all know Him, from the greatest to the least of us. Jeremiah 31:33 – 34.

Jesus said that eternal life is to know God. John 17:3 Also see Galatians 4:9.

3. The Character and Attributes of God – Communicable and Incommunicable

The Character of God has been categorized in theology in accordance with His attributes.

An attribute is a characteristic that is true of someone. The Attributes of God are those truths and characteristics about Him through which we may know of Him and know Him better. The Attributes of God have often times been categorized as “incommunicable” or unshared and “communicable” or shared with humanity. According to theologian Louis Berkhof,

“The incommunicable attributes of God are those that emphasize the absolute being of God, the communicable attributes stress the fact that He enters into various relations with His creatures.”

Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, pg. 57.

The following lists are adapted from the Systematic Theologies of Louis Berkhof and Wayne Grudem.

Incommunicable (Unshared) Attributes of God:

Self- Existence (Aseity): God is self-existent, independent and self-sufficient. Isaiah 43:10, 44:6; John 5:26; Acts 17:24, 25; Colossians 1:16

Immutability (Unchangeable): God is unchangeable in His essential nature. Isaiah 46:9,10; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 6:17,18; James 1:17

Infinity: God is limitless in accordance with His essential nature and character. Job 11:7; Ps. 102:27; Ps. 145:3

Perfection: God is absolutely perfect, without any flaw in a qualitative sense. Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 18:30; Matthew 5:48

Omnipresence: God transcends spatial limits and is present in all points of space at the same time with His whole being. Ps. 139:7-10; Ps. 145:18; Jeremiah 23:23,24; Matt. 28:20; Hebrews 4:13

Unity: God is essentially one in being and essence. He is one divine being. Deut. 6:4; 1 Kings 8:60; 1 Timothy 2:5

Communicable (Shared) Attributes of God:

Spirituality: God is Spirit and invisible as to His essential being. John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17

Omniscience (Knowledge): God knows everything both actual and possible, eternally and perfectly.

Ps. 7:9; 33:13; 94:11; 147:4; Prov. 15:3; Isaiah 40:28; Rom. 11:33; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20

Wisdom: God in accordance with His knowledge and intelligence manifested in adapting His appointed means to His intended ends. God's choice of the best means to accomplish His goals and plans. Luke 11:49; Romans 11:33, 16:27; Eph. 3:10

Veracity (Truthful): God is truth personified. God always speaks truth. Ps. 31:5; Isaiah 45:19; Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; 1 John 5:20

Goodness: God's absolute perfections as the ultimate standard of good. Ps. 34:8; Mark 10:18

Love: God's benevolent self-communication of Himself to His creatures in general and His self-giving in redemptive relationship to His people. Ps. 36:7; Ps. 86:5; Ps 106:1; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:38, 39; Titus 3:4; 1 John 3:1

Grace: God's free gift of His kindness and love, undeserved and unearned. Ps 116:5; Eph. 1:6; 1 Pet. 5:10

Mercy: God's tender compassion in accordance with His goodness and love toward those in misery and distress. Ps. 25:6; Ephesians 2:4; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 1:3; Jude 21

Longsuffering/ Patience: God's patient forbearance of sinners. Ps. 78:38; Ps. 103:8, 10; Romans 2:4; Romans 9:22; 2 Peter 3:15

Holiness: God's transcendent supreme perfections. God's separation from sin and evil. God's holiness is His only attribute that is exalted three times. Exodus 15:11; Ps. 30:4; Isaiah 6:3; 1 Peter 1:15; Rev. 4:8

Righteousness/ Justice: God is the ultimate standard of right and always does the right thing.

God is the righteous Judge of the earth. Ps. 7:11; 25:8; 33:5; 45:6; John 17:25; James 4:12; 1 John 1:9

Faithfulness/ Trustworthiness: God's reliability. He can be trusted to be faithful. Ps. 33:4; Ps. 89:8; Isaiah 25:1; Prov. 3:5; 1 Peter 4:19

Jealous: God always protects His own honor in relation to His creation. God expects that He alone be the object of worship. Exodus 20:5, 34:14; Ps. 79:5; Ezekiel 5:13; Nahum 1:2; 1 Cor. 10:22

Wrath: God hates sin and evil intensely and will punish it in righteousness. Ps. 12:2; Ps. 21:9; Isaiah 59:18; John 3:36; Romans 1:18, 12:19; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 5:9

Sovereign Will: God's own free will exercised over His creation. Ps. 24:1; Ps. 75:6; Eph. 1:11

Omnipotence (Sovereign Power): God's absolute power to carry out His desires, divine will.

Job 42:2; Ps 115:3; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Rom. 4:20,21; Rev. 19:6

The Names of God

Elohim Plural of EL "Strong One." Translated "God" Isa. 54:5	Yahweh Tsidkenu "The Lord our Righteousness." Jer. 23:6
El Shaddai "God Almighty." Gen. 17:1	Yahweh Shammah "The Lord is there." Ezek. 48:35
El Elyon "The Most High God." Gen. 14:19	Yahweh Elohim Israel "The Lord, God of Israel." Jud. 5:3
El Olam "The Everlasting God." Gen. 16:13	Adonai "Master, owner." Gen. 18:2
YHWH "I Am that I Am" Covenant Name of God Ex. 6:3	Theos "God." Greek NT John 3:16
Yahweh Yireh "The Lord will provide." Gen. 22:14	Kurios "Lord." John 20:28
Yahweh Nissi "The Lord is my Banner." Ex. 17:15	Pneuma Ho Hagion "Holy Spirit" John 14:26
Yahweh Shalom "The Lord is Peace." Judges 6:24	Logos "The Word" John 1:1
Yahweh Sabaoth "The Lord of Hosts." 1 Sam. 1:3	Abba "Father" "Daddy" Romans 8:15
Yahweh Maccaddeshcem "The Lord your Sanctifier." Ex. 31:13	Pater "Father" John 17:1
Yahweh Ro'I "The Lord my Shepherd." Ps. 23:1	

Adapted from Bible.org - (Not an exhaustive list)

In the previous pages we have begun an overview of the first article of our statement of faith. In expounding upon the doctrine of our Tri-une God, we have looked at what the Scriptures teach about His existence and nature, and we have done a survey of His attributes and names. As we contemplate these great Biblical truths, may the Spirit stir us unto greater love, devotion, worship and obedience to our awesome Tri-une God. Our next article will be devoted to the Tri-unity of God.

More resources for further study:

Christian Beliefs – Wayne Grudem, Chapter 2
Systematic Theology – Wayne Grudem, Pages 141 - 375
Systematic Theology – Louis Berkhof, Pages 19 – 176
Bitesize Theology – Peter Jeffery, Pages 17 - 21

Online resources:

Free Articles/Online books:

The Glory of God – John Piper

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/the-glory-of-god-as-the-goal-of-history>

Attributes – AW Pink

<http://refocusingoureyes.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/The-Attributes-of-God-by-A.W.-Pink.pdf>

Attributes – Sam Storms

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/studies/attributes-of-god/>

Free Audio:

Introduction to the Doctrine of God - RW Glenn

http://www.solidfoodmedia.com/resources/condensed_theology_lecture_8_theology_part_1_introduction_existence

The Sovereignty of God – An Interview with Francis Chan

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/theology-refresh/the-sovereignty-of-god#/listen/full>

Free Video:

The Holiness of God – RC Sproul

http://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/holiness_of_god/

The Providence of God – RC Sproul

http://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/providence_of_god/