

DOCTRINE OF GOD

Lesson 1: The God Who Is

- I. GOD THE COMMUNICATOR: *He is not silent.*
- a. He tells us who he is.
 - i. *El/ theos*: the generic name for God/ gods. “Mighty one”
 - 1. *El* is often combined with other nouns to form compounds, like *El-Shaddai*, “God Almighty/ Powerful”
 - 2. *El* is also often followed by “of” to denote the person or people who belong to him, like “God of Abraham”.
 - ii. *Yahweh*: the name of God given to Israel (Ex. 3:14: *I am who I am.*)
 - 1. This name is to be revered because it speaks of God’s transcendence. (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:16)
 - 2. This name also speaks of God’s immanence. It is his name given to Israel to distinguish him from the false gods of the world. (Ex. 20:2)
 - iii. *Adonai*: a title – “Lord” “Judge” “Ruler”.
 - b. He communicates analogically.
 - i. Due to his infinitude, God cannot be **comprehended**. (1 Ki. 8:27: *But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built. Rom. 11:33: *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and inscrutable his ways!*)*
 - ii. But, by communicating through creaturely analogies, his nature and being can be **apprehended**. [James Henley Thornwell: “...his infinite perfections are veiled under finite symbols. It is only the shadow of the phenomenal symbols of nature that God deploys as well as propositional symbols of language.” (Quoted in James Dolezal, All That Is in God, p.70) “The temple and the Shekinah glory could not adequately measure the God who dwells in unapproachable light and whom no man has seen nor can see (1 Tim. 6:16). So also the articulated propositional form of Scripture’s language cannot adequately measure the simple manner of God’s infinite existence.” Dolezal, pp.70-71]
 - c. He communicates naturally and supernaturally.
 - i. He speaks to us through the created order. (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-20) This revelation is sufficient to condemn us.
 - ii. He also speaks to us through Scripture. (Ps. 19:7-14; 2 Pet. 1:16-21) This revelation is necessary to save us.

- II. GOD THE CREATOR: *He is not us.*
- a. We must always distinguish the Creator from the creation.
 - i. While God is self-existent, the whole of his creation is derived from his creative decree. (Acts 17:24-25)
 - ii. Because of this, it is always wrong to try and capture the divine essence by images of creatures. (Acts 17:29)
 - b. His creative work implies his authority over all this world.
 - i. Humans belong to the created order, yet bear unique responsibility in it. [*The doctrine of creation leads to the idea of human stewardship of the creation, which is to be contrasted with a secular notion of human ownership of the world. The creation is not ours; we hold it in trust for God.*] – Alister McGrath, Christian Theology, An Introduction (4th Edition), pp. 227-228]
 - ii. All humanity owes him worship and obedience. Since humanity is in rebellion against his rule, all people are called to repent. (Acts 17:30-31)
 - c. While we live in and are part of the creation, the most we can say about our humanity is that we are created “in God’s image”. (Gen. 1:26-27)
 - i. This provides a “bridge” between God and humanity that allows us to relate to God in a way unique with all creation. However, sin has damaged the bridge in such a way as to leave humanity frustrated and longing. In our longing, we tend to substitute other things from creation to fill the void. [Augustine: *“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”*]
 - ii. Bearing the *imago Dei* gives humans an exalted status that brings certain judgment for those that sin against other humans. (Gen. 9:6: *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.* James 3:9: *“...curse people made in the likeness of God.”*)
 - d. The doctrine of creation teaches us the essential goodness of the created order.
 - i. In the creation account, we read the words, *“And God saw that it was good.”*
 - ii. So, while the creation is separate from God (contra pantheism), it nevertheless bears his creative imprint and that makes it both good and worthy of redemption. (Rom. 8:20-22)

- III. GOD THE PERSON: *He is not far off.*
- a. In Paul's words at Athens: "*Yet he is actually not far from each one of us...*" (Acts 17:27)
 - b. Contra Deism, God has made himself "close" to his creation, so that even non-Christian philosophers know that, "*In him we live and move and have our being.*" (17:28)
 - c. Further, God reveals himself to be personal. That is, he is relational. He communicates with us and we with him. So if his creative power reminds us of his transcendence, so his personage communicates his immanence.
 - d. We'll forgo detailed discussion of the difference between "nature" and "personality" until a later lesson on the Trinity. It is sufficient right now to know that God relates to us and himself through his personality.