

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE. LIVE OUT YOUR FAITH.

LESSON 1: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

The term Theology is today used in both a narrow and a broad sense. It is derived from two Greek words, *theos* and *logos*, the former meaning "God" and the latter meaning "word." In the narrow sense, therefore, theology may be defined as the doctrine of God. But in the broad and more usual sense the term has come to mean all Christian doctrines.

I. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

A. IT IS ASSUMED BY THE SCRIPTURES

It does not seem to have occurred to any of the writers of either the Old or New Testaments to attempt to prove or argue for the existence of God. Everywhere, and at all times, it is a fact taken for granted. The Bible begins with, "In the beginning God..." and the Scriptures continue throughout to take His existence for granted.

B. THE UNIVERSAL ARGUMENT

Both Scripture and history prove that the belief in God is universal. Paul stated in Rom. 1:19-21 and again in 2:15 that the heathen have a knowledge of God, and that it is "written in their hearts." One anthropologist said, "This Supreme Being is to be found among all the peoples of the primitive cultures." David Livingstone said, "The existence of God and a future life is everywhere recognised in Africa."

C. THE MORAL ARGUMENT

Man's conscience insists that there are fundamental laws in the universe and that it is man's duty to observe these laws. Known violations of these moral law are followed by feelings of guilt and fear of judgment. Thus, conscience recognises the existence of a great Lawgiver, a moral Being through Whom man has a sense of right and wrong. (Rom. 2:15)

D. THE ARGUMENT FROM CAUSE

Everything that is begun must have an adequate cause; therefore, the universe must have an adequate cause for its production. Since causes produce effects, there must therefore be a First Cause. This First Cause had to be outside the universe and intelligent. Hebrews 3:4 states, "For every house is built by some man; but He that built all things is God." Creation demands a Creator!

E. THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

Order and useful arrangement in a system imply intelligence and purpose in the originating cause. The universe is characterised by order and useful arrangement; therefore, the universe has an intelligent Architect. (Ps. 8:3-9; 19:1)

F. THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE

The greatest proof for the existence of God is personal experience. Lives have been transformed by the power of God and specific answers to prayer have been realised. (Jn. 7:17; II Cor. 5:17; Heb. 11:6)

G. THE ARGUMENT FROM PROPHECY

Only God can consistently forecast the future. Twenty-five distinct prophecies alone were fulfilled at the crucifixion of Christ.

II. NON CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF GOD

A. ATHEISM

An atheist denies the existence of God. There are probably not as many confirmed atheists as the world would have us to believe. A great number are practical atheists—they merely excuse their indifference on the ground of the inconsistencies of certain professed Christians. (Ps. 14:1)

B. AGNOSTICISM

This term is limited to those views which affirm that neither the nature of God, nor the existence and ultimate nature of the universe is known or knowable. It does not deny that there is a God, but it believes that He can not be known.

C. DEISM

This belief maintains that God, while the creator of the world, does not sustain it or have any further relations to it. God made the universe and left it to run itself without any interference on His part. Man is left to work out his own destiny by his own power. Deism denies special revelation, miracles, and the providence of God.

D. SCEPTICISM

Skeptics have doubts about the existence of God. They are looking for something or someone who is real.

E. PANTHEISM

This view states that God is in everything—God is all; all is God. Thus, God is identified with nature and not held to be independent and separate from nature. God is said to be an unconscious impersonal force working in the world. This view destroys the foundation for morals, denies personal immortality, and deifies man making him a part of God.

F. POLYTHEISM

This view believes in a plurality of Gods. The Greeks and Romans were polytheistic, while today the Hindu and heathen cultures are.

G. MONOTHEISM

This is belief in one God. Christianity, Judaism and Islam are monotheistic. Though monotheism is necessary for salvation, it does not save—the devil and his demons are also monotheists! (Ja. 2:19).

III. TRI-UNITY OF GOD

By “the Trinity” we mean that there is only one true God in three coeternal and coequal Persons known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is Three in One; a unity of the Godhead.

The three Persons in the Godhead are identical in essence, equal in power and glory, have the same attributes and perfections yet execute distinct and harmonious offices in the great work of redemption. (Dt 29:29; Isa. 55:8, 9; I Jn. 5:7-9).

A. PROOFS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. Plural Names for Deity

The name "God" in Genesis 1:1 is Elohim—the plural noun in Hebrew means "two or more." However, the verb used is singular suggesting a plurality (the Trinity) in creation.

2. Personal plural pronouns for Deity

"And God said, Let 'us' make..." We see a plural suggested in these verses by the use of plural pronouns. (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7)

3. The work of the Holy Spirit

In Genesis 1:1 the Bible declared that God created the earth, and then in verse 2 the Holy Spirit is singled out as having a part in creation.

B. PROOFS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

On 1 John 5:7-8, see the footnote.¹

1. The Baptism of Christ

In Matthew 3:16, 17 we find the Father speaking from heaven, the Son being baptised, and the Spirit descending as a dove.

2. The Baptism Model

Matthew 28:19 states, "Baptising them in the name [singular] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

3. The Apostolic Benediction

2 Corinthians 13:14 states, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost..."

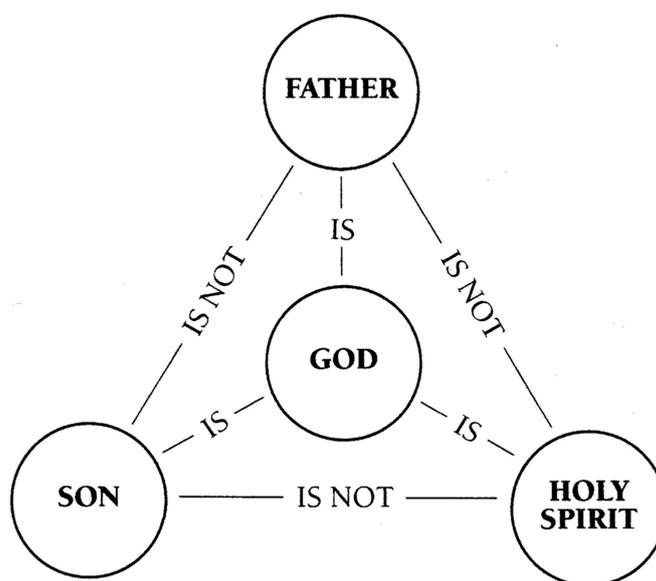
¹ GILL comments: "The genuineness of this text has been called in question by some, because it is wanting in the Syriac version, as it also is in the Arabic and Ethiopic versions; and because the old Latin interpreter has it not; and it is not to be found in many Greek manuscripts; nor cited by many of the ancient fathers, even by such who wrote against the Arians, when it might have been of great service to them: to all which it may be replied, that as to the Syriac version, which is the most ancient, and of the greatest consequence, it is but a version, and a defective one. The history of the adulterous woman in the eighth of John, the second epistle of Peter, the second and third epistles of John, the epistle of Jude, and the book of the Revelations, were formerly wanting in it, till restored from Bishop Usher's copy by De Dieu and Dr. Pocock, and who also, from an eastern copy, has supplied this version with this text. As to the old Latin interpreter, it is certain it is to be seen in many Latin manuscripts of an early date, and stands in the Vulgate Latin edition of the London Polyglot Bible: and the Latin translation, which bears the name of Jerom, has it, and who, in an epistle of his to Eustochium, prefixed to his translation of these canonical epistles, complains of the omission of it by unfaithful interpreters. And as to its being wanting in some Greek manuscripts, as the Alexandrian, and others, it need only be said, that it is to be found in many others; it is in an old British copy, and in the Complutensian edition, the compilers of which made use of various copies; and out of sixteen ancient copies of Robert Stephens's, nine of them had it: and as to its not being cited by some of the ancient fathers, this can be no sufficient proof of the spuriousness of it, since it might be in the original copy, though not in the copies used by them, through the carelessness or unfaithfulness of transcribers; or it might be in their copies, and yet not cited by them, they having Scriptures enough without it, to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, and the divinity of Christ: and yet, after all, certain it is, that it is cited by many of them; by Fulgentius (z), in the beginning of the "sixth" century, against the Arians, without any scruple or hesitation; and Jerom, as before observed, has it in his translation made in the latter end of the "fourth" century; and it is cited by Athanasius (a) about the year 350; and before him by Cyprian (b), in the middle, of the "third" century, about the year 250; and is referred to by Tertullian (c) about, the year 200; and which was within a "hundred" years, or little more, of the writing of the epistle; which may be enough to satisfy anyone of the genuineness of this passage; and besides, there never was any dispute about it till Erasmus left it out in the, first edition of his translation of the New Testament; and yet he himself, upon the credit of the old British copy before mentioned, put it into another edition of his translation." (z) Respons. contr. Arian. obj. 10. & de Trinitate, c. 4. (a) Contr. Arianum, p. 109. (b) De Unitate Eccles. p. 255. & in Ep. 73. ad Jubajan, p. 184. (c) Contr. Praxeam, c. 25.

4. Jesus Christ Taught It

John 14:16 states, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter..."

5. All three Persons are recognised as God

The Father, who is God (Rom. 1:7; Jn. 6:27; I Pet. 1:2). The Son, who is God (Heb. 1:8; Ti. 2:12, 13). The Holy Spirit, who is God (Acts 5:3, 5).



IV. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Attributes are the description of a person's nature and character. The following attributes describe the Triune God and therefore each Person of the Trinity. The following discussion is in now way comprehensive. It lists the dominate truths of who God is; the most common of His attributes.

A. NATURAL ATTRIBUTES

God's natural attributes reflect more of His nature; that which is inherent to His very being.

1. God is Omniscient

God knows all things and is absolutely perfect in knowledge. (Ps. 139:1-6; Job 11:7-8; I Jn. 3:20)

2. God is Omnipotent

God can bring to pass everything which He wills. God's power has no limitations. (Rev. 19:6; Mt. 19:26; Eph. 3:20)

3. God is Omnipresent

God is everywhere present. This is not the pantheistic idea which claims that God is in everything and everything is God. (Ps. 139:7-12; I Cor. 3:16)

4. God is Immutable

Although God may change His program (the way He deals with man), His nature and character are unchangeable; they are absolute. (Mal. 3:6; Ja. 1:17; Heb. 13:8)

5. God is Eternal

God has never had a beginning, nor will He ever have an ending. God exists endlessly; He will never cease to exist. (Ps. 90:2; Gen. 21:33)

6. God is Sovereign

God is in complete control of all things and He “ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” This does not contradict with the free will responsibility of men. (Dan. 4:17, 25; Eph. 1:11; Ps. 135:6)

B. MORAL ATTRIBUTES

God's moral attributes reflect more of His character; specifically in relation to righteousness and evil, truth and error.

1. God is Holy

Holiness occupies the foremost rank among the attributes of God. It is named often in the Bible and is the perfection by which God especially wants to be known.

The name of God the Father, Son and Spirit are all called “Holy”. (Jn. 17:11; Isa. 6:2, 3; Acts 3:14; 4:27, 30; Eph. 4:30). Holiness means that God is totally separate from sin or evil and absolutely pure. Because He is holy, He is therefore Just and Righteous.

2. God is Love

In love God reaches out compassionately to sinful man who is helplessly lost in sin. As directed toward mankind, God's love is unconditional and undeserved. Before God could manifest His love, He had to declare His holiness—the Cross is the greatest manifestation of His holiness and love. The Cross demonstrates His hatred for sin and His love for the sinner. Because “God is love,” He therefore is Gracious, Merciful, Faithful and Forgiving. (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:8, 9; 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:8).