



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Chapter 2 The Doctrine of God**





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.1 – The Doctrine of God

### The Existence of God

When history began in Genesis 1:1, God already existed. No one had to create God. God simply is. Jesus said: **“The Father has life in Himself”** (John 5:26). That is why He gave Himself the name **“I AM”**: **“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”** (Exodus 3:14).

God said to the prophet Isaiah: **“I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD”** (Isaiah 43:10-11). God gave Himself the name **“I AM”**. This name is closely related to the Hebrew name **JHVH**, which is usually translated **“LORD”** in English translations or sometimes **JeHoVaH** or **JaHVeH**: **“The LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King”** (Jeremiah 10:10).

God is not willing to share His glory with any other so-called god: **“Besides Me there is no God”** (Isaiah 44:6). The many other gods are invented by men in their imaginations. These so-called gods are only lifeless idols. **“But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands”** (Psalm 115:3-4).

No idol can do what God does. For example, only God can predict the future and make it happen just as He said: **“I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done”** (Isaiah 46:9-10). Over a hundred and fifty years before it actually happened, God said that a king named Cyrus would release the Israelites from their bondage in Babylon (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

At one point, Moses wanted to see God in His glory. But God said to him: **“You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live”** (Exodus 33:20). There are many things we do not know about God, for God has not chosen to reveal them to us. But He has chosen to reveal to us the way of salvation. **“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him”** (John 1:18). If we want to know what God is really like, all we have to do is look at Jesus. He has revealed God to us by His words and by His deeds. Jesus said: **“No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him”** (Matthew 11:27).

God reveals to us the way of salvation through His Son, Jesus. Jesus said: **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”** (John 14:6). Jesus prayed to His Father on the night before He died: **“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”** (John 17:3). The most blessed truth about God is that He wants us to have eternal life, and for that reason He has sent His Son Jesus to win for us that eternal life. Through Jesus, and only through Jesus, we shall one day enjoy eternal life in heaven: **“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as also I am known”** (1 Corinthians 13:12).

## Questions

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1. What name did God give to Himself when He talked to Moses?
2. What does this name mean?
3. What word is used in English Bibles to convey this name?
4. List some ways in which the true God is different from idols.
5. Through whom has God revealed the way of salvation to us?
6. What would happen to us if we were to see the face of God in glory now?
7. When will we see the face of God?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.2 – The Doctrine of God

### The Natural Knowledge of God

Every human being has access to a partial knowledge of the true God by observing His creation. **“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork... There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard”** (Psalm 19:1-3). **“Since the creation of the world His (God’s) invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead”** (Romans 1:20). From creation we can learn that God is glorious, powerful, wise, and eternal.

Every human being can gain a partial sense of God’s goodness also from how God takes care of His creatures from day to day. On his mission journeys to cities that did not have a written revelation from God, the apostle Paul referred to this partial knowledge of God. In the city of Lystra Paul declared: **“He (God) did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness”** (Acts 14:17). In the city of Athens Paul addressed the crowd with these words: **“He (God) gives to all life, breath, and all things... He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being”** (Acts 17:25-28).

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul explained that everyone has a partial knowledge of God through God’s law, which He puts into all human hearts, and from the conscience God has given to each person: **“When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them”** (Romans 2:14-15).

The word “law” is used in several different ways in this passage. When Paul says that the Gentiles (the non-Jews) do not have the law, he means that they did not have the written revelation of God’s will that God gave to the Jewish people through Moses. But even though the Gentiles had never heard of the Ten Commandments that God gave to the Jews, their inward nature told them that there were certain things that were right and other things that were wrong. Their conscience would tell them whether what they did was right or wrong, so that these Gentiles at times did by nature what the Ten Commandments demand. They refrained from murdering, committing adultery, and stealing, because their inner nature told them these things were wrong.

God has written His law in man’s hearts from the very beginning, so that every human being has an inward sense of right and wrong. At the same time, God has given every human being a conscience, an inward awareness that there is a God (or some higher being) to whom he must give answer at some time. Because of this law written in his heart and his conscience (his awareness of God), he experiences accusing thoughts when he does something contrary to this law in his heart, and he experiences excusing thoughts when he follows this law in his heart.

This natural knowledge of God, however, is not able at all to make any human beings truly godly in their thinking or behavior. Paul told the Roman Christians that the many Gentiles in the world routinely **“suppress the truth in unrighteousness”** (Romans 1:18). Throughout history **“they did not like to retain God in their knowledge”** (Romans 1:28), and therefore **“God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting, being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual**

**immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32).**

Notice that these Gentiles, as well as all the unbelievers living today, have a certain knowledge of God and His law. They are aware that God will judge them for their actions. Nevertheless, they continually commit sins they know are wrong, and they also give their approval to others who commit these same sins. For this reason, the author of the letter to the Hebrews describes human beings as being **“all their lifetime subject to bondage” “through fear of death”** (Hebrews 2:15). In other words, people do wrong, they know they are doing wrong, they know that they will be punished for their wrongdoing by God, and so they are afraid to die and face their Creator and their God.

It is clear that the natural knowledge of God cannot give anyone eternal life. Why, then, has God given human beings this knowledge? Paul told the crowd at Athens: **“so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him”** (Acts 17:27). The natural knowledge of God leads people to seek for God and His truth. This results in religion being found in every culture. This natural knowledge of God also provides a point of contact for Christian missionaries bringing the Gospel to unbelievers. As missionaries bring God’s law to unbelievers, call attention to their sins and the coming judgment of God, the unbelievers recognize from their own natural knowledge of God that what the missionaries are saying about their sin and God’s judgment is true.

### Questions

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1. What can everyone learn about God by observing what God has created?
2. How did the apostle Paul show the people of Lystra that God had been good to them?
3. How did the Gentiles show that God’s law was written in their hearts?
4. Why do we say that the law written in man’s hearts does not make them godly?
5. What do unbelievers do with their natural knowledge of God?
6. Why is it that people all over the world are afraid to die?
7. In what way are Christian missionaries helped by the natural knowledge of God?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.3 – The Doctrine of God

### The Revealed Knowledge of God

Thanks be to God that He has chosen to reveal Himself to us more clearly than through creation and conscience. From the very beginning God has chosen to reveal Himself through His Word. At first it was the spoken word and then also by means of written words that He gave to chosen prophets and apostles: **“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”** (1 Corinthians 1:21). The natural knowledge of God is thus regarded as no knowledge of God at all by the Holy Spirit in this passage because it does not reveal the identity of the true God or His plan of salvation. No one can be saved by the natural knowledge of God. For this reason, God chose to use words, a message, preaching as a means to impart His salvation to human beings.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin (Genesis 3), God revealed Himself to them by giving them the promise of a Savior (Genesis 3:15). God continued to communicate this message of salvation to individuals and groups by means of oral communication (for example, to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Beginning with Moses and the first five books of the Bible, God began to put His message into written words through prophets. This revelation from God continued through the days of the Old Testament. God did not give this revelation all at once. He gave it little by little until His Old Testament revelation was complete.

But the best was yet to come: **“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son”** (Hebrews 1:1-2). That Son of God is Jesus. **“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him”** (John 1:18). The people who lived during the days when Jesus walked on the earth were privileged to hear the Word of God directly from God Himself in the person of His Son. There is no greater or more perfect revelation from God than Jesus.

But we today still have this revelation. Jesus assured His followers who knew Him face to face: **“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:25-26).

Thus, God reveals Himself to us not only through the Old Testament, which Jesus accepted as the revealed Word of God, but also through the New Testament, written by Jesus’ apostles and their assistants. The apostle Paul, for example, confirmed that the words he wrote in his New Testament letters came from the Holy Spirit. He said: **“No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches”** (1 Corinthians 2:11-13).

The natural knowledge of God cannot save anyone, but the revealed knowledge of God, as given to us in writing in the Old Testament and the New Testament, gives salvation and eternal life. Jesus said to His Father: **“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”** (John 17:3). John wrote his Gospel for this very purpose: **“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His**

**name”** (John 20:31). The written Scriptures of the Holy Spirit in both Testaments **“are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 3:15). This is true, because **“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,”** literally breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16).

### Questions

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1. Why is the natural knowledge of God unable to give us eternal life?
2. How did God reveal Himself in the days of the Old Testament?
3. What is the most complete revelation that God has given us of Himself?
4. In what way do we have this same revelation today?
5. How do we know that the writings of the apostles are a revelation from God?
6. For what purpose has God chosen to reveal Himself to us?
7. Where should we look if we want to learn something about the true God?





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.4 – The Doctrine of God

### Names and Descriptions of God

In the Bible, God described Himself with such concepts as life, light, love, and truth. **“We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life”** (1 John 5:20). **“God is love”** (1 John 4:8). **“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”** (1 John 1:5). **“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself”** (John 5:26).

We cannot know God fully, of course. But God does describe Himself in terms of things we know, so that we can at least get some idea of what He is like. **“He...is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen”** (1 Timothy 6:15-16). **“God is Spirit”** (John 4:24). **“God is exalted by His power...God is great...With God is awesome majesty...He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice”** (Job 36:22, 26; 37:22-23).

God has given Himself the name **JHVH** (Jehovah or Jahveh), translated in most English Bibles as **“LORD”**. This name is related to the verb “to be” as indicated by His words to Moses: **“I AM WHO I AM...Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”** (Exodus 3:14). This name indicates the constancy, the faithfulness, and the dependability of God. He makes promises and keeps them. He can fulfill His promises because He is supreme and dependent on no one else.

The Bible calls God **EL** or **ELOHIM**, which is the plural of El. This is a more generic name for God. El and Elohim are generally translated as **“God”**. The word seems to emphasize His majesty and power, since it is used in Genesis 1: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”** (Genesis 1:1). **“Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand”** (Deuteronomy 32:39).

Another name for God is **ADONAI**, which is translated as Lord (without the capital letters). This word describes God as a master or boss. Abraham once used this term when he prayed to God: **“I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord”** (Genesis 18:27).

Sometimes the word El is used together with other words. Perhaps the most well-known is **EL SHADDAI**, which is translated as **“God Almighty”**.

Here are some examples of other names for God:

- **And Joshua said, ‘By this you shall know that the living God is among you’.** (Joshua 3:10)
- **I ... will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.** (Psalms 7:17)
- **He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.** (Psalm 91:1)
- **But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King.** (Jeremiah 10:10)
- **the God of gods** (Daniel 11:36)

## Questions

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1. Which concepts are associated with God in the Bible?
2. Why can it be said that we know God, and yet we do not know Him?
3. What is the meaning of the name JHVH?
4. What other names are used for God in the Bible?
5. What is the most common name for God in the language you know best?
6. If there are other names for God in this language, name them.
7. Which name for God do you use when you pray to Him?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.5 – The Doctrine of God

### The Essence of God

God did not come into existence from some outside cause or force. He simply is and always has been and always will be. Moses said: **“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God”** (Psalm 90:1). Through the prophet Isaiah, God said: **“I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God”** (Isaiah 44:6).

God is totally self-sufficient: He is dependent on no one. He does not need our worship or gifts to sustain Him. The apostle Paul said: **“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things”** (Acts 17:24-25).

God is not limited by any concept of time or space. He is not bound by the so-called laws of nature. He is not restricted to laws of logic. He is infinite in every way and absolutely independent. After King Solomon had built the holy temple of God in Jerusalem, He said: **“But will God dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!”** (1 Kings 8:27). King David, Solomon’s father, likewise declared: **“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable”** (Psalm 145:3). God is above nature. The miracles that He does show us that fact. Many of the teachings of His Word are above and beyond the ordinary laws of logic.

The Hebrew word *“Elohim”* is plural, but there is no doubt that God is one: **“The LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him”** (Deuteronomy 4:35). **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”** (Deuteronomy 6:4). The apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth: **“We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live”** (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

Since God is always as He has always been, God does not grow. There are no parts or divisions in God. He is altogether the whole God wherever He is. Some false teachers claim that monotheism (the concept that there is only one God) is a gradual development from an earlier time when people believed in many gods. But polytheism (the concept that there are many gods) is not a lower stage of development that gradually evolved into monotheism. Adam and Eve believed that there was only the one true God, and they taught their immediate descendants that there was only one God. Polytheism came later. It is a degeneration from the monotheism that was the religion of Adam and Eve and their immediate descendants. Paul explained the rise of polytheism in this way: **“Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things”** (Romans 1:21-23). Jesus said: **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”** (John 4:24).

Because of God's revelation of Himself in creation, conscience, and Holy Scriptures, we cannot teach or tolerate false views of God, such as the following:

- Polytheism, the idea that there are many gods
- Dualism, the idea that there is one good god, and one bad god, equally eternal
- Monism, the idea that there is no difference between God and His creatures, that all is one thing
- Pantheism, the idea that God is everything and that everything is God
- The idea that God is an impersonal force rather than a personal Being
- The Mormon idea that God has a body like a human body and was once a man.

The Bible speaks of God's hands, eyes, or ears, but this does not mean that God has a body like a human body. This is figurative language. It uses human terms to help us understand things about God that we could not understand otherwise. **"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry"** (Psalm 34:15). This means that God sees all and hears all, especially the activities of those who believe in Him, those who are righteous. Speaking of the God of Israel, Balaam said to King Balak: **"God is not a man"** (Numbers 23:19). This, and other verses, show us that God does not have a body like ours.

### Questions

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1. Why do we need God, but He does not need us?
2. What does it mean that God has no parts or divisions?
3. Why do we say that God is unlimited?
4. What is wrong with the theory that polytheism evolved into monotheism?
5. What Bible passages prove that God does not have a human body?
6. What is meant by God's eyes and ears and hands?
7. What is the main idea of God in your native country?
8. If this idea of God is contrary to Bible teaching, what Bible passage teaches you that it is false?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.1 – The Doctrine of God

### The Attributes of God: Loving, Unchanging, Eternal, Perfect

The main attribute of God that He wants to convey to us through His Word is His love for the human race: **“God is love”** (1 John 4:16). The knowledge of God that we receive through nature and conscience is only a faint glimpse of that love. In fact, many things in nature may convey to us God’s anger at sin, rather than His love for sinners (floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, volcanoes, accidents, wars, sickness, etc.). But God’s Word from Genesis to Revelation presents God to us as a loving God.

Consider these words from 1 John: **“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ... And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world”** (1 John 4:9-10, 14).

Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus: **“For God so (in this way) loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

In His love for the world, God sent His Son to save the world through His life and death. But God did even more. After Jesus rose from the dead, God sent His Holy Spirit into the world with the good news of what Christ had done, so that through the Gospel people might be brought to believe in Jesus and thus be given eternal life. Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:4-6). God uses all of His attributes out of love to save the world. God proclaimed His name to Moses in these words: **“The LORD. The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty”** (Exodus 34:6-7).

God is unchangeable. Psalm 102 says: **“They (the heavens and the earth) will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same”** (Psalm 102:26-27). James, the brother of our Lord, writes: **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”** (James 1:17).

Because God is unchangeable, we can always trust what He says. **“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself”** (2 Timothy 2:13). **“The counsel of the LORD stands forever”** (Psalm 33:11). The prophet Samuel told King Saul: **“The Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent”** (1 Samuel 15:29).

When Bible occasionally speaks of God’s changing His mind or repenting, it means that God changes His conduct toward us from our point of view. For example, after allowing the human race to grow and prosper for many years in spite of widespread wickedness, God apparently changed course and said: **“I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them”** (Genesis 6:7). Nevertheless, His desire to save mankind from eternal death never changed, and He did give them many years to repent.

Sometimes God threatens to do something and yet does not do it. His threats are intended to bring about repentance, and when the people repent, He does not carry out His threats. God sent the prophet Jonah to the city of Nineveh to proclaim this threat: **“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”** (Jonah 3:4). But when the city of Nineveh repented, we read that **“God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it”** (Jonah 3:10). This was God’s very purpose in issuing the threat. God certainly knew in advance what would happen when Jonah proclaimed God’s Word.

God is eternal. Moses declared: **“Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God”** (Psalm 90:2). In a sense, time is meaningless for God. **“A thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night”** (Psalm 90:4). The prophet Isaiah said that God “inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57:15). To God, the past, present, and future are all present. God the Father spoke of eternity when He said to His Son: **“Today I have begotten You”** (Psalm 2:7). Time can be represented by a straight line from one place to another. Eternity is a circle that encloses the line from beginning to end.

There is love between and among the three Persons of the Triune God. On the evening before His death, the Son of God, Jesus, spoke of the love of His Father. In His prayer to His Father He said: **“You have loved Me”** (John 17:23). **“You loved Me before the foundation of the world”** (John 17:24). On that same evening Jesus said: **“I love the Father”** (John 14:31). Twice before the Father said to the Son: **“You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased”** (Luke 3:22; 9:35). Since **“the fruit of the Spirit is love”** (Galatians 5:22), we can be sure the Holy Spirit also shares in this love.

God is perfect in every way. Jesus told a ruler among the Jews: **“No one is good but One, that is, God”** (Luke 18:19). In His sermon on the mount Jesus said: **“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”** (Matthew 5:48). **“Good and upright is the LORD”** (Psalm 25:8).

Because of His perfection, there is a majesty and glory and awesomeness in God that strikes fear in the hearts of sinners. Moses assured the Israelites that they should not be afraid of their enemies: **“You shall not be terrified of them; for the LORD your God, the great and awesome God, is among you”** (Deuteronomy 7:21). King David praised God in these words: **“Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as Head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all”** (1 Chronicles 29:10-12).

## Questions

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1. What is the main attribute of God that is revealed to us in His Word?
2. In what two main ways did God reveal His love for mankind?
3. What does it mean that God is unchangeable?
4. Why is God’s immutability important for us?
5. Why did God not carry out His threat against the city of Nineveh?
6. What is the difference between time and eternity?
7. What is the relationship between the three Persons of God?
8. Why is it true that God is the only One who is good?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.2 – The Doctrine of God

### The Attributes of God: Omnipresence

God's Word teaches us that God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at the same time. There is no place where He is not. And wherever He is present, He is at work. He is not idle as an observer. There is no creature anywhere in the universe that is outside the presence of God. We cannot fully understand what this means, but the Bible fully demonstrates God's omnipresence in words and actions.

Rahab, the non-Israelite woman of Jericho, had heard how the Lord had saved the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. She testified to the two spies sent by Joshua: **"The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath"** (Joshua 2:11). When King Solomon finished the building of the great temple of God in Jerusalem, He admitted: **"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!"** (1 Kings 8:27). God cannot be fenced in or limited by any physical space.

The most complete discussion of God's omnipresence is recorded in Psalm 139. Here are some of the things that King David says: **"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make My bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me"** (Psalm 139:7-10).

The Old Testament prophets also taught that God is present everywhere. Isaiah wrote: **"Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool'"** (Isaiah 66:1). Jeremiah testified: **"'Am I a God near at hand,' says the LORD, 'and not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?' says the LORD; 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the LORD"** (Jeremiah 23:23-24). The prophet Jonah tried to escape from God, but he learned that that was impossible. God's prophet Amos learned this same truth: **"Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down; though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them"** (Amos 9:2-3). God does His work in these far-off places. He appointed a fish to swallow Jonah in the sea, and He could also command a serpent to bite His enemies at the bottom of the ocean.

Christ's apostles, of course, agreed with this understanding. The apostle Paul told his heathen audience in Athens: **"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands...He gives to all life, breath, and all things...He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being"** (Acts 17:24-28). The **"we"** in this passage refers to all people everywhere; not just to Christians. The physical life of all is empowered by the ever-present God. Every movement of every creature is enabled by the ever-present God. Our very existence is determined by this omnipresent God, who cannot be contained, controlled, or limited in any way. No one can see His presence or prove God presence scientifically, because the Scriptures tell us He is **"invisible"** (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17). Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria: **"God is Spirit"** (John 4:24). But even though we cannot see or prove He presence, we know that He is there because He Himself tells us He is everywhere.

Another term that is sometimes used to describe God is "immensity". This word is used to mean that God is incapable of not being present everywhere. It means that God must be everywhere and that it

is impossible to limit his presence. God's presence extends to other planets, other solar systems, other galaxies, and even beyond the space of the universe. As Solomon said: **"Heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You"** (2 Chronicles 6:18).

The omnipresence of God pertains to all creatures, but there is a special gracious presence of God with His believing children. This presence is called the mystical union of God with His people. David says: **"I will fear no evil; for You are with Me"** (Psalm 23:4). The apostle Paul also took comfort in the gracious presence of God: **"The Lord stood with me and strengthened me"** (2 Timothy 4:17). Unbelievers do not have this gracious presence of God. We will be discussing this mystical union in more detail in a later lesson.

Pantheism is contrary to God's Word, because pantheism makes no distinction between God and His creatures. Pantheism teaches that everything is God, and God everything.

Deism is also contrary to God's Word. Deism teaches that God created everything in the beginning, but that God is no longer present with His creatures in an active way. It teaches that creation functions without the active intervention of God. The deistic concept of God is that of a clockmaker who is not involved at all with his clock after he has made it.

### Questions

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1. What does the word "omnipresent" mean?
2. What had Rahab learned about the God of Israel?
3. What did King Solomon realize about the temple of God he had built?
4. Why is it impossible to escape from the presence of God?
5. How did the prophet Jonah learn this truth?
6. What is meant by these words: **"In Him we live and move and have our being"**?
7. How can we be sure that God is present everywhere?
8. What is the difference between omnipresence and God's gracious presence?
9. In what ways are pantheism and deism contrary to the teaching of the Bible?
10. Do the religions of your native country teach that God is omnipresent?





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.3 – The Doctrine of God

### The Attributes of God: Omniscience

God's Word teaches us that God is omniscient, which means He knows all things. He knows everything without studying. He knows everything without any omissions or errors in His understanding.

Samuel's mother, Hannah, said: **"The LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed"** (1 Samuel 2:3). How much knowledge does He have? There is no limit to what God knows. **"His understanding is infinite"** (Psalm 147:5). **"The eyes of the LORD are in every place"** (Proverbs 15:3). His Word **"is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account"** (Hebrews 4:12-13). He **"knows all things"** (1 John 3:20).

As the Creator, God knows everything about every one of His creatures. Job understood this, even before God appeared to him, for he said: **"He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole heavens"** (Job 28:24). God showed the depth of His knowledge when He Himself appeared to Job by asking Job: **"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundation fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone?"** (Job 38:4-6). We cannot even imagine the knowledge God has concerning the workings of the human mind and the construction of all the living things. He knows the design of every plant and animal, all the designs of the vast universe. The more we learn about the human body and the creatures of the world, the more we realize how complex all things are. They far beyond our ability to comprehend.

One aspect of God's knowledge that confuses the human mind is God's knowledge of what is going to happen in the future. For example, when God chose Moses to lead the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt, He told Moses to go to the Egyptian Pharaoh and demand that he let his slaves go free. But God also told Moses: **"I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go"** (Exodus 3:19). When Moses gave the excuse that he could not go to Pharaoh because he was not a good speaker, God spoke to him sharply: **"Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart"** (Exodus 4:14). James, Jesus' brother, said the same thing at the meeting of the early Christians in Jerusalem: **"Known to God from eternity are all His works"** (Acts 15:18).

What is even more incredible is that God knows what will happen in any situation that might arise. God know what will happen no matter what decision a person might make. For example, when David was hiding out from King Saul, he wanted to know what would happen if he stayed in the city of Keilah, so he asked God: **"Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down?"** God replied: **"He will come down... They will deliver you"** (1 Samuel 23:11-12). Based on this advanced information from God, David left the city of Keilah and escaped from King Saul.

God revealed to His prophet Jeremiah what would happen to the people of Judah if their king Zedekiah surrendered to Babylon and what would happen if Zedekiah did not surrender. Jeremiah was able to inform the king: **"If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live... But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand"** (Jeremiah 38:17-18). Zedekiah chose not to surrender, and what God said would happen did happen.

Jesus said what would have happened if He had performed His miracles in Tyre and Sidon or in Sodom: **"If the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes...If the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day"** (Matthew 11:21, 23).

God does not gain knowledge from any source, nor does He learn things gradually. He knows everything from eternity. The prophet Isaiah taught this truth with rhetorical questions: **"Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? ... Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?"** (Isaiah 40:13-14). These questions expect the answer: "no one!"

God's knowledge is clear and distinct even to the tiniest details. David acknowledges the Lord's incredible knowledge when he says in Psalm 139: **"O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether"** (Psalm 139:1-4). Jesus said: **"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered"** (Matthew 10:29-30).

What God knows is always correct and exact. The Lord said to Samuel: **"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"** (1 Samuel 16:7). Wise King Solomon said to God: **"You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men"** (1 Kings 8:39). Unbelievers are foolish when they think that God does not see their evil deeds. **"His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps. There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves"** (Job 34:21-22).

God's knowledge covers the past, the present, and the future. To God these are all the same. God knows our whole lives before we are even born. David declares: **"My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest part of the earth? Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them"** (Psalm 139:15-16).

Since God knows everything that happens in the future, it is easy for Him to predict flawlessly what is certain to happen in the days to come. God revealed to the prophet Isaiah that the people of Judah would be captured by the Babylonians and that they would be freed by a king named Cyrus. God revealed the name of their deliverer many years before that man was even born. Speaking for God, Isaiah said: **"I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come"** (Isaiah 41:25). **"I am the LORD, ... who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid''"** (Isaiah 44:24-28). God challenged the idols worshiped by false prophets to make predictions like Him: **"Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods"** (Isaiah 41:22-23). No one knows the past like God. No one knows the future like God.

When we think of God's amazing knowledge, we must say with David: **"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it"** (Psalm 139:6), or with the apostle Paul: **"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"** (Romans 11:33).

God knows the evil things that men do even before they do them, but this does not free them of their responsibility and guilt. God holds man responsible for his actions. The apostle John saw it all in a vision: **"I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ... and anyone not found written in the Book of Life was**

**cast into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:12-15). These books contain all the information concerning men's thoughts, words, and deeds. There is escape only for those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

### **Questions**

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1. What does the term “omniscience” mean?
2. How can we prove from the Bible that God knows the thoughts of every person?
3. What did God know would happen when Moses appeared before the Pharaoh?
4. Why did David leave the city of Keilah when King Saul was chasing him?
5. Why was King Zedekiah foolish to keep on fighting with the Babylonians?
6. What is the source of God’s vast knowledge?
7. Why is God’s prophecy concerning Cyrus of Persia so amazing?
8. Since God knows everything, what must He know about us?
9. What will be written in the books that are opened on Judgment Day?
10. What is the Book of Life, and whose names are written there?
11. Why can we say that to God the past, the present, and the future are all the same?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.4 – The Doctrine of God

### The Attributes of God: Omnipotence

God's Word teaches us that God is omnipotent. This means He can do whatever He wants to do. He has unlimited power. He is almighty. His power is above all human ability and even beyond human comprehension. However, this does not mean that He can sin. If He could sin, He would not be the holy God.

When God told Abraham that his wife Sarah was going to give birth at her advanced age, she laughed at that possibility. But God said to Abraham: **"Why did Sarah laugh? ... Is anything too hard for the LORD?"** (Genesis 18:14). When God demonstrated His power to Job by referring to God's creation of the behemoth and the leviathan (dinosaurs, perhaps), Job replied: **"I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You"** (Job 42:2).

The omnipotence of God is highlighted in many of the Psalms. **"He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"** (Psalm 33:9). The power of God was displayed by God's creation of the universe and everything in it. We think of the destructive power of floods and tsunamis; such power is only a small fraction of the power God has at His disposal: **"The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea"** (Psalm 93:4) Psalm 115:3: **"But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases."** There are no limits. Psalm 135:6: **"Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures."** In the United States people foolishly talk about "the forces of nature" and refer to "Mother Nature", but only rarely do they acknowledge the Lord God as the One controlling all of nature.

Since God is omnipotent, there is no one stronger than He. **"There is no one who can deliver out of My hand,"** He says through His prophet. **"I work, and who will reverse it?"** (Isaiah 43:13). God's prophet Jeremiah agreed in his prayer to God: **"Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You"** (Jeremiah 32:17).

Human wisdom tells us that no human baby can be born without a human father. God's angel messenger Gabriel told Mary of Nazareth that her son would not have a human father. **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."** And then the angel added: **"For with God nothing will be impossible"** (Luke 1:35-37). John the Baptist agreed. He said to the Jews who took pride in the fact that Abraham was their ancestor: **"God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones"** (Luke 3:8).

Jesus said, **"it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,"** but He assured His puzzled disciples: **"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"** (Matthew 19:24-26). On the night before His death, Jesus prayed to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane: **"Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me"** (Mark 14:36). God did not take that cup of suffering away from Jesus, for it was His will that Jesus would suffer and die in our place to take away our sin and to give us eternal life.

The only proper response to the almighty power of God is to praise Him: **“Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”** (Revelation 19:6). **“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen”** (Ephesians 3:20-21).

God exercises His almighty power in two ways. Usually He uses natural means. For example, He cures people by means of medicine or a physician’s treatment. He keeps people alive by providing food, drink, and shelter in the normal ways, that is through the growing of crops, by supplying rain and sunshine, by allowing people to harvest the crops, by giving good health so that food can be eaten, etc. He protects a nation against its enemies by means of soldiers, weapons of war and wise strategies.

But God can also exercise His almighty power by means of supernatural events that we call miracles. At certain times in world history, God performed many miracles. For example, God did many miracles in the days of Moses, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, and in the days of Jesus and His apostles. At other times God’s miracles were very rare and perhaps even often unnoticed.

After the great world-wide flood recorded in Genesis, God reset the natural forces that rule our world today, and they will not change until Jesus returns again. This is God’s promise: **“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease”** (Genesis 8:22). Because of this promise of God, we do not have to be worry that this order that God has established will be altered by the so-called climate change.

God can suspend the laws of nature at any time. He did when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, **“and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left”** (Exodus 14:22). In the days of the prophet Elisha, a borrowed iron ax head fell into the water. The Bible says: **“He made the iron float”** (2 Kings 6:6). Some years later, King Hezekiah of Judah received a special sign from the Lord. God said to him: **“I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward”** (Isaiah 38:8). Time went backwards! This is impossible for man, but not for God.

Daniel’s three friends were thrown into a furnace so hot that the persons who threw them in were killed. But these three walked out of the furnace unharmed. The watching crowd **“saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them”** (Daniel 3:27).

The greatest miracle is not a physical miracle but a spiritual miracle. This miracle is the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God and the sacraments to change unbelieving enemies of God into His believing children. Jesus taught both a physical resurrection and a spiritual resurrection in these words: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.”** That is the spiritual resurrection. Then He said: **“Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”** (John 5:25-29). This is the physical or bodily resurrection. God’s almighty power accomplishes both kinds of resurrection. The apostle Peter says that those who have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ have **“been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”** (1 Peter 1:23). Even as God created the entire world by His almighty Word, so He creates a spiritual life of faith by means of His Gospel Word.

## Questions

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1. What do the word "omnipotence" mean?
2. Why did Sarah laugh when she heard she was going to give birth?
3. What was God's response to her laughter?
4. How did God demonstrate His almighty power to Job?
5. What are a few things God cannot do?
6. Why did God answer Jesus' Gethsemane prayer with a "No"?
7. How does God usually use his power in our daily lives?
8. List some Old Testament miracles and some New Testament miracles.
9. What great miracle will take place on the Last Day?
10. Why do we not have to fear any climate change in our world?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.5 – The Doctrine of God

### The Attributes of God: Wisdom

God's wisdom refers to how God uses His vast knowledge and power according to His gracious plans for the benefit of His children. **"The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly"** (Proverbs 15:2). God's ways do not always seem wise to us, for God's ways are foolish to the natural man. But when we study God's Word and consider how God has worked throughout history, we are led to say with Paul: **"To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever"** (Romans 16:27). **"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever"** (1 Timothy 1:17).

The wisdom literature of the Old Testament emphasizes God's wisdom demonstrated by the creation of the world. **"O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions"** (Psalm 104:24). **"The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens"** (Proverbs 3:19). Proverbs chapter 8 details how God's wisdom is demonstrated in the various things He made, arranged, and continues to control even to this day. **"He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion"** (Jeremiah 10:12). God has balanced all the forces in nature. The earth is neither too hot nor too cold for human habitation. We see this balance in the water cycle, in the intricacies of the human body and brain, and in the balance between animal life and plant life.

The wisdom of God is also evident in the way God has worked and continues to work in history up to the present time. The life of Joseph is presented in Genesis chapters 37 to 50. He was Jacob's favorite son, he was sold into slavery, he was put into prison, and God was with him all the way until he was exalted to great honor in Egypt and enabled to provide for his family and bring about the move of the children of Israel to the land of Egypt, where God wanted them to be. Joseph recognized God's hand in his life and told his brothers how the evil they had done was used by God for good. **"As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive"** (Genesis 50:20).

Eliphaz, Job's friend, was not a good counselor or comforter for Job in his troubles, but he spoke the truth when he said that God **"does great things, and unsearchable, marvelous things without number. He gives rain on the earth, and sends water on the fields. He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot carry out their plans"** (Job 5:9-12). Job agreed with Eliphaz and added an important point: **"He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them"** (Job 12:23). As history unfolds, we cannot figure out what God is doing, but Job assures us: **"God understands its way, and He knows its place"** (Job 28:23).

Daniel was known in Babylon as a very wise man, but that was only because God gave Daniel wisdom to interpret dreams and visions. Daniel recognized that this wisdom was not his, but God's: **"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him. I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You"** (Daniel 2:20-23).

The apostle Paul revealed that God rules the world according to His grand plan for the good of His people: **“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”** (Romans 8:28). The highest and deepest aspect of God’s wisdom is His plan for the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Paul says about this Gospel: **“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory”** (1 Corinthians 2:7). What is this wisdom? **“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe... We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”** (1 Corinthians 1:20-24).

The wisdom of God is centered in His plan of salvation through a crucified and risen Messiah. **“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence”** (Ephesians 1:7-8).

### Questions

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1. What is the difference between God’s knowledge and God’s wisdom?
2. How does God’s creation of the world demonstrate God’s wisdom?
3. How does the life of Joseph illustrate the wisdom of God?
4. What is God’s grand plan as He controls the destinies of nations?
5. Can you see God’s wisdom in the history of your nation? Explain.
6. What kind of wisdom did God give to Daniel?
7. Why does Paul call Christ crucified the wisdom of God?
8. How is the Gospel both foolishness and wisdom at the same time?
9. What events in your own life proves the truth of Romans 8:28?





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.6 – The Doctrine of God

### The Attributes of God: Holiness and Righteousness

God is holy. This means that He is absolutely pure and sinless. He loves good and hates evil. He is not like us. He is far above us. We are not worthy to stand in His presence. After God led them across the Red Sea on dry ground, Moses and the children of Israel sang this song of praise: **“Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness?”** (Exodus 15:11). The psalmist instructs us: **“Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy”** (Psalm 99:9).

The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the **“holy, holy, holy ... LORD of hosts”**. His reaction was: **“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”** (Isaiah 6:3-5). In Revelation 15:3-4 the people praise God in these words: **“Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy.”**

Since God Himself is holy, He requires that we, who were originally made in His image, also be holy. When the Lord delivered the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, He said to them: **“I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy”** (Leviticus 11:44). This is still the standard for the new Israel, that is, all believers in Jesus, for the apostle Paul wrote: **“He (God) chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love”** (Ephesians 1:4). The apostle Peter likewise wrote: **“As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’”** (1 Peter 1:15-16).

God’s moral law determines what is holy and what is not holy. The moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments as they are explained in the New Testament. What God commands is good. What God forbids is evil. Everything that the Bible neither commands or forbids is called *adiaphora*. *Adiaphora* can be good or bad, depending on the circumstances.

God’s Word must determine for us what holiness is, and there is no higher judge. **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”** (2 Timothy 3:16). The scribes and Pharisees promoted their own laws above God’s law. Jesus said this about them: **“In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”** (Matthew 15:9).

Because God is holy, evil cannot stand in His presence. David says to God: **“You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man”** (Psalm 5:4-6). The prophet Ezekiel warned his people that a day of judgment is coming: **“Then the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel...I will not let them profane My holy name anymore”** (Ezekiel 39:7-8).

If all human beings are sinners, and no sinner can dwell in God’s sight, then how can anyone pass God’s examination on Judgment Day? The answer to that question is the cross of Christ. In the cross of Christ God’s holiness is on full display. On the cross the holy God punished His Holy Son because He was bearing the sin of the world.

In the Old Testament, God commanded many bloody animal sacrifices to pay for sin. These many sacrifices prefigured Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross. If the Israelites had been able to keep God's holy commandments, no sacrifices would have been necessary. Moses told the people: **"The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways"** (Deuteronomy 28:9). But even the prophet Isaiah had to confess that He was sinful when he was given a vision of the holy God: **"Woe is me, for I am undone!"** God then presented the solution to his sin problem. Isaiah said: **"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged'"** (Isaiah 6:5-7). The altar shows that the solution to the problem of sin is a sacrifice on an altar, namely, the sacrifice of the holy Son of God on the altar of the cross.

Sinful man had no solution to the problem of sin. God Himself had to provide the fitting sacrifice. **"Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory"** (Psalm 98:1). **"Christ...has...given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma"** (Ephesians 5:2). **"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place (heaven) once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"** (Hebrews 9:12-14).

The term "righteousness" in the Bible can be used in two ways. In one way it refers to the perfect holiness of God, which demands that we be as holy as He is; otherwise, He will punish us. This is the righteousness of the Law. Psalm 7:11: **"God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day."**

On the other hand, the Bible very often speaks of the righteousness of God as His gift to us. It is a gift won for all sinners by the perfect life and perfect death of Jesus Christ, God's holy Son. In this sense, righteousness is our salvation. The cross shows God's punishing righteousness at work as He punishes His Son in His righteousness, because His Son, Jesus, was bearing the sin of the world. God cursed and punished and even forsook His Son as though this Son were guilty of all the sin that has ever been committed by the entire human race. In fact, because God counted the sin of the world against Jesus, Jesus was really guilty of all at that moment and had to be punished. But since Jesus was indeed punished for the sin of the world, God pronounced the whole world righteous in Him. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament proclaim this righteousness of God by which we are saved.

The first half of Psalm 22 presents in advance the scene of the cross: God punishing His Son for all human sin. But the second half of Psalm 22 concludes with these words: **"They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this"** (Psalm 22:31). Very often the prophet Isaiah refers to God's righteousness and salvation in the same sentence. For example, he says in Chapter 51:5-6: **"My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands will wait upon Me, and on My arm they will trust...My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished."** In the same way, the prophet Jeremiah spoke of the Messiah as our salvation and also our righteousness: **"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"** (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul explains the righteousness of God very clearly. It is the theme of the letter: **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel (good news) of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the**

**righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’**” (Romans 1:16-17). In the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, not His righteousness which condemns our sin, but His righteousness which He freely gives to us because Jesus was already punished for all human sin. This is the good news. All human sin went to Jesus, and He was punished for that sin. In its place Jesus gives us His perfect righteousness – the perfect righteousness of God. Through Jesus we have the total forgiveness of all our sins and we are holy before God; therefore, we have salvation and eternal life.

Paul explained in the letter: **“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe”** (Romans 3:21-22) The righteousness of God is God’s gift to us, which we receive by faith. It is God’s promise of His righteousness which becomes our righteousness simply by our trusting in it.

### **Questions**

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1. What does it mean that God is holy?
2. How did the prophet Isaiah feel when he was in the presence of the holy God?
3. What is God’s standard of life and behavior for human beings?
4. How do we know what behavior God considers holy?
5. What must all of us confess in the presence of the holy God?
6. What is the only way in which we human beings can be counted as holy by God?
7. What was the main purpose of all the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament?
8. In what two ways is the word “righteousness” used in the Bible?
9. Why does the prophet Jeremiah call the coming Messiah our righteousness?
10. How does the cross of Jesus display God’s holiness and His righteous anger?
11. What did Jesus win for the whole world by His suffering on the cross?
12. How does Christ’s righteousness become our righteousness?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.6.7 – The Doctrine of God

### The Attributes of God: Love, Mercy, Grace

We have already talked about God's love. It is hard to speak about God without speaking of His love, for God is love. In this lesson we bring together some of the different aspects of God's love, focusing finally on God's love for us in Christ.

God loves all of His creatures. That is why He takes care of them as He does. Psalm 104 says that God provides food and drink to all creatures. He provides **"wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart"** (Psalm 104:15). He also takes care of the trees, the hills, the cliffs, the seas and all that live in them: **"These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good"** (Psalm 104:27-28). The Lord God rejoices in all His works. He **"gives food to all flesh, for His mercy endures forever"** (Psalm 136:25). Jesus said: **"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these"** (Matthew 6:26-29).

God has a special love for mankind. He made in His own image, originally holy and righteous like Himself. Even after the fall into sin, God cares for all mankind. Jesus said: **"He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"** (Matthew 5:45). He made the whole universe for the benefit of mankind. Even the commandments He gave were intended for man's benefit, as Jesus said: **"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"** (Mark 2:27). Not only did God create the world for man; He preserves the world for man's benefit. **"He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness"** (Acts 14:17).

In particular God shows His love for mankind by providing a Savior from sin for the whole world: **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"** (John 3:16-17). **"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"** (1 John 4:9-10). **"He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"** (1 John 2:2). **"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us"** (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). **"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Romans 5:8).

The Bible also speaks of a special bond of love and affection between God and those whom He has brought to faith in His Son. For example, Psalm 147:11 declares: **"The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy."** The prophet Isaiah gives us this message from God for His believing Israel: **"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine... I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you"** (Isaiah 43:1-4). Isaiah compares the love of God for His people with the love of a mother for her infant child: **"Can a woman forget her nursing child,**

**and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me” (Isaiah 49:15-16).**

The special bond of love that God has for His people is shown us by the love Jesus had for His closest followers. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, says of his Master: **“Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end”** (John 13:1). In His private conversation with His disciples on the evening before His death, He said: **“He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him”** (John 14:21-23).

Likewise, the apostle Paul assured the believers in Corinth that the Holy Spirit also was living within them: **“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?”** (1 Corinthians 6:19). Paul wrote: **“You are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty’”** (2 Corinthians 6:16-18). Those who believe in Jesus are God’s family whom He loves dearly. **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God”** (1 John 3:1).

The Bible uses other terms to express God’s love in its many manifestations. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul uses four different words in one sentence to describe the love of God: **“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”** (Titus 3:4-7).

God’s kindness is His willingness to cancel the punishment we deserve: **“Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You!”** (Psalm 31:19). In Romans 11:22 we have God’s goodness and severity presented side by side: **“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.”** We must teach both God’s goodness and His severity.

The term **“mercy”** is God’s love as He sees our misery and has compassion on us. This is illustrated in the story of the Good Samaritan, who had compassion on the wounded man lying by the roadside. The apostle Paul praises God for His mercy and compassion, saying: **“Blessed be the God and Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation”** (2 Corinthians 3:3-4). We are given a glimpse of God’s mercy and compassion in Jesus’ ministry to the sick and grieving. **“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”** (Hebrews 4:16).

It seems the apostle Paul’s favorite word to refer to God’s love is the word **“grace”**. Grace can be defined as God’s undeserved love for sinners, as revealed in the words and works of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of God is God’s gift to mankind because of Christ, as Paul says: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:23-24). Our justification, or righteousness before God, is a free gift because of Jesus’ life and death in our behalf. Paul compared our sin and God’s grace by comparing Adam and Christ: **“For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many... For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ... The law entered that the offense might abound. But**

**where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”** (Romans 5:15-21). Adam brought sin into the world, so that all are sinners. Jesus Christ brought God’s grace to the world. God’s undeserved love forgives sinners because of Christ’s work of redemption, and those who receive this gift by faith are given the gift of eternal life.

Grace and merit are opposites that cannot stand together: **“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no more grace”** (Romans 11:6). The world teaches that we saved by our own works in obedience to God’s laws. But the Bible teaches that we saved by grace, that is, by God’s undeserved love without any merit or worthiness in us : **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8).

God’s love is not in conflict with His perfect holiness. God’s holiness is evident on the cross of Jesus: in His hatred of sin He punishes His own Son because He is burdened with the sin of the world. God’s grace is evident on the same cross: through Christ’s suffering in our place, God has established a righteousness that covers all the sin of the world. God offers this salvation to all as a free gift. God’s holiness and God’s love meet on the cross.

### Questions

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1. What does God do every day out of love for all of His creatures?
2. What does God do every day out of love for those created in His image?
3. Why did God send His Son into the world of sinners as a Savior?
4. Why is it important for our comfort that Jesus died for all sinners?
5. What special bond exists between God and those who believe in Jesus?
6. Where does the Bible teach that God lives in us?
7. Which four terms for love does Paul use in his letter to Titus?
8. If your native language is not English, what is the equivalent of these four terms in your native language?
9. What is the slight difference in meaning between God’s mercy and God’s grace?
10. Explain what this means: “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more”?
11. Explain how God’s holiness and God’s love meet on the cross.



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.1 – The Doctrine of God

### One God in Three Persons

In Lesson 2.5 The Essence of God, we saw that Scripture teaches that there is only one God. At the same time, the Bible talks about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we make a careful study of everything God has revealed to us about Himself in the Bible, it is clear that God has described Himself as one God with three specific entities, that we call Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since God has revealed Himself as one God in three Persons, the early Christians created the terms “Trinity” and “Triune” to summarize the Bible’s teaching about God. These words are not found in the Bible, but the doctrine that these terms represent is clearly taught in Scripture.

God tells us clearly in the Bible that there is only one God. The LORD (Jehovah, Jahveh) is that one true God. The Bible also teaches us that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. These three are one God and yet at the same time distinct from each other, and thus separate Persons of God.

The distinctness between the three Persons is clear from the scene at Jesus’ baptism, as recorded in Matthew 3:16-17:

**When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’**

God the Father is the speaker from heaven. Jesus, the man who is baptized, is His Son. The Spirit of God descends like a dove on Jesus. These three are not interchangeable. It would not be right to say that the Son spoke from heaven or that Jesus was His Father. It was not the Father who came down on Jesus like a dove, but it was the Holy Spirit. So, each Person is separate, and yet there is only one God.

At Jesus’ baptism all three Persons were present. All three Persons were present today when we baptize someone, for Jesus has told us to **“go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (Matthew 28:19). One name in three Persons. Because of the order Jesus uses here, we call the Father the First Person, the Son the Second Person, and the Holy Spirit the Third Person. This does not imply any rank or hierarchy.

When the angel Gabriel told the girl Mary that she would have a son, he spoke of the three Persons of God. He said to her: **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God”** (Luke 1:35).

On the evening before He died, Jesus talked of the three Persons of God as separate entities. He said to His disciples: **“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth”** (John 14:16-17). On that same evening Jesus told them: **“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”** (John 15:26).

In his letters the apostle Paul often referred to the three Persons as separate from each other. For example, in speaking of God's gifts to His believers, Paul wrote: **"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all"** (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). When Paul says "Lord", he is almost always talking about Jesus. When Paul says "God", he is almost always talking about the Father. We see, for example, in his closing benediction to these same Christians in Corinth: **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all"** (2 Corinthians 13:14).

### Questions

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1. Why does it not matter that the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible?
2. Use a previous lesson to show from the Bible that there is only one God.
3. How were the three Persons present at Jesus' baptism?
4. How does the Bible show that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is not the Father?
5. What are some of the different orders in which the three Persons are listed in the Bible?
6. Why do we call the Father the first Person, the Son the Second Person, etc.?





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.2 – The Doctrine of God

### Evidence of the Trinity in the Old Testament

All the passages in our previous lesson were from the New Testament. There is no doubt that the New Testament speaks of the three Persons of God. In the Old Testament, God did not reveal Himself as the Triune God as clearly as He did in the New Testament. Nevertheless, there are hints of the Trinity also in the Old Testament. When God created human beings, He spoke of Himself in the plural. He said: **“Let Us make man in Our image”** (Genesis 1:26). When God confused human languages and brought an end to the building of the tower of Babel, He said: **“Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech”** (Genesis 11:7).

In a prophecy of the coming Messiah, the prophet Isaiah, speaking for God, says: **“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him”** (Isaiah 42:1). Jesus is the Servant of God whom God (the Father) was sending into the world, and God says He will put His Spirit on His Son. Notice that the three Persons of God are distinguished from each other.

So also, we have a hint of the Trinity in Isaiah’s vision of God where he hears the seraphim (angels) crying out to one another: **“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts”** (Isaiah 6:3). Bible students have also recognized the three Persons of God in the blessing that God gave to the first high priest Aaron, Moses’ brother: **“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace”** (Numbers 6:24-26).

In particular there are passages in the Old Testament that clearly distinguish between the Father and the Son, and call both Father and Son God. In Psalm 45 God (the Father) is speaking to a King whom He calls God. God says to Him, who is also God: **“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions”** (Psalm 45:6-7). Psalm 2 refers to this anointed King as the Son of God in these words: **“I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion”**. These are the words of the Father. Then we hear the words of the Son: **“I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’”** (Psalm 2:6-7). Likewise Psalm 110 refers to both Father and Son in these words: **“The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”** (Psalm 110:1).

In both the Old and the New Testaments, the word<sup>1</sup> that is usually translated as “angel” literally means “messenger”. In the New Testament, “angel” usually refers to a created spirit being or to a messenger from God, like a pastor (for example, in Revelation 2 and 3). But in the Old Testament, the word “Angel” often refers to One who is the Lord God Himself. In the Old Testament, the Son of God is often called the Angel (or Messenger) of God. For example, when Moses was 80 years old and taking care of the sheep of his father-in-law, **“the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush”** (Exodus 3:2). This was not a created angel, for the Bible then says of Him: **“The LORD saw that he (Moses) turned aside to look”** (Exodus 3:4). Then this Angel of the LORD (who was Himself the LORD) said to Moses: **“I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”** (Exodus 3:6). Later in the conversation, this Angel said to Moses: **“I AM WHO I AM”**

<sup>1</sup> the Hebrew word is *mal’ak* (מַלְאָךְ) and the Greek is *angelos* (ἄγγελος), both of which mean “messenger”.

(Exodus 3:14).

Similarly, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar (Genesis 16 and 21), Abraham (Genesis 22), Jacob (Genesis 31 and 32), the Israelites as they crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 14), Gideon (Judges 6), Samson's parents (Judges 13), and Zechariah (Zechariah 3). Malachi 3:1 identifies the Angel of the Lord as the promised Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God. God says to the people through Malachi: **"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me, and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming."** The first messenger is clearly John the Baptist, whom God sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. The second Messenger (or Angel) is the Lord Himself, for whom John prepared the way. He is called the Messenger of the covenant. Thus, the Old Testament believers also had evidence from God's Word that the Messiah, who would be sent by God would also be God.

### Questions

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1. How is the Trinity taught in the book of Genesis?
2. How did the prophet Isaiah refer to the three Persons of God?
3. In what two passages does the number three seem to hint at three Persons?
4. Since there is only one God, what does it mean when God anoints God in Psalm 45?
5. What is the meaning of the word "angel"?
6. How do we know that the Angel of God in the Old Testament is God Himself?
7. How does Malachi show that the Angel or Messenger of God is Jesus?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.3 – The Doctrine of God

### The Father Is God and the Son Is God

In the Bible, the term “God” usually refers either to the Triune God or to God the Father. For example, the apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians: **“For us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live”** (1 Corinthians 8:6).

There have been many false teachers in history and many today who deny that Jesus is God. For example, the Muslims teach that Jesus is a prophet of God, but not God Himself. For this reason, it is very important that we become convinced by the Holy Spirit through the words of Scripture that Jesus, the Son of God, is true God.

Chapters 7-12 of the book of Isaiah are sometimes called the Immanuel book because in these chapters the prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah, who is given the name Immanuel. Immanuel means “God with us.” For example, we read in Isaiah 7:14: **“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”** When Jesus was then born of the virgin Mary, Matthew explains: **“All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated ‘God with us.’”** (Matthew 1:22-23). And Isaiah 9:6 says: **“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given,”** and then he says **“His name will be called...Mighty God.”**

John the Baptist was God’s messenger to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. **“John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, “He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me””** (John 1:15). John meant that while He was six months older than Jesus by birth and in human age, at the same time, Jesus existed before John, because Jesus is eternal God.

When Jesus was born, a created angel appeared to the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem and said to them: **“There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:11). By calling the baby Jesus **“Lord,”** this angel was saying that Jesus is God. Even the evil angels (or demons) had to confess that Jesus is God. **“They cried out, saying, ‘What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?’”** (Matthew 8:29).

God the Father Himself spoke with an audible human voice and declared that Jesus was the Son of God. After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist at the Jordan River, the voice of the Father said: **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”** (Matthew 3:17). When Jesus’ appearance was changed on the high mountain in the presence of Peter, James, and John, the voice of the Father again said: **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”** (Matthew 17:5).

Jesus taught us to call God **“our Father”** (Matthew 6:9) in our prayers to God, but Jesus Himself never called God **“our Father.”** He considered God to be His Father in a very special sense, and therefore referred to Him as **“Father”** or **“My Father”** (Matthew 11:25-27). The Jewish leaders understood what Jesus meant, for we read: **“Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God”** (John 5:18). On the night before He was crucified, Jesus prayed: **“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”** (John 17:5). Who can speak

like that to God except One who is Himself God, with all the eternal glory of God? Finally, when Jesus was on trial before the Jewish high council, the high priest put Jesus under oath and asked Him: **“Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”** Jesus answered truthfully: **“I am”** (Mark 14:61-62).

### Questions

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1. Why is it important to study what the scriptures say about the nature of Christ?
2. Which groups teach that Jesus is not true God?
3. What is revealed about Jesus in his baptism and transfiguration?
4. How do we know that the Jews understood Jesus’ teaching that he was true God?
5. Why was it so significant that Jesus answered the high priest, “I am”?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.3.1 – The Doctrine of God

### Jesus Is God – He Has the Attributes of God

**Jesus is loving, eternal, immutable, and perfect. Therefore, He is God.**

The words and works of Jesus on earth abundantly demonstrate His love. Of course, the greatest proof of his love is his death in our place on the cross. It is written: **“Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor”** (Ephesians 5:2).

Jesus reveals that he is eternal and unchangeable in His prayer to His Father on the night before His death: **“O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”** (John 17:5). The Old Testament had prophesized that **“His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom”** (Daniel 7:27), and that His throne **“shall be established forever”** (2 Samuel 7:16). The epistle to the Hebrews declares: **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”** (Hebrews 13:8). Most amazingly, when His enemies told Him that He could not have seen, Jesus responded: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM”** (John 8:58).

The apostle John affirmed the perfection when he wrote: **“In Him there is no sin”** (1 John 3:5).

**Jesus is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. Therefore, He is God.**

The Gospel of John clearly teaches the omnipotence (almighty power) of Jesus. John’s Gospel begins with this statement: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”** (John 1:1-4). We know that the Word is Jesus, the Son of God, because John says a few verses later: **“the Word became flesh”** (John 1:14). The Son of God created the world, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is the Author of life, **“for as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself”** (John 5:26). Jesus proved that He has life in Himself when He raised Himself from the dead. He said: **“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”** (John 10:17-18). Jesus had not only the power to raise Himself from the dead, but the power to raise others. He said: **“For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will”** (John 5:21). This means Jesus gives both physical life and spiritual life.

Not only did Jesus create the world, but He also sustains it from day to day. The apostle Paul wrote: **“By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth... All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist”** (Colossians 1:16-17). This means that all things are held together by Him. The letter to the Hebrews speaks of Him as **“upholding all things by the word of His power”** (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus Himself spoke of His work of sustaining all things when He said: **“My Father has been working until now, and I have been working”** (John 5:17).

The Gospel of John also teaches the omniscience (knowledge) of Jesus: **“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man”** (John 2:23-25). After His

resurrection from the dead, Jesus asked Peter three times about his loyalty to Jesus, since Peter had denied Jesus three times on the night of Jesus' arrest. Peter replied: **"Lord, You know all things; You know that I love you"** (John 21:17). Because of His divine omniscience, Jesus was able to foretell the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple before it happened. He told His disciples: **"Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down"** (Mark 13:2). Jesus then told His disciples more details of what would happen in 70 A.D. when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and its temple.

We see the omnipresence of Jesus in His promise: **"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"** (Matthew 18:20). After His resurrection, Jesus assured His disciples: **"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"** (Matthew 28:20). Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper according to Jesus' instructions, the body and blood of Christ are present and are received by us as we eat the bread and drink the wine. For the apostle Paul taught the Christians at Corinth: **"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"** (1 Corinthians 10:16).

**Jesus is wise, holy, merciful, gracious. Therefore, He is God.**

Paul taught the wisdom of Jesus when he wrote that it was Jesus **"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"** (Colossians 2:3). This should not be surprising, **"for it pleased the Father that in Him (Jesus) all the fullness should dwell"** (Colossians 1:19), **"for in Him (Jesus) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"** (Colossians 2:9).

Jesus Himself taught His holiness and His righteousness when He challenged His enemies: **"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"** (John 8:46). Jesus was the perfect sacrifice to take away the sins the world because He was personally holy and sinless. The apostle Peter wrote: **"You were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"** (1 Peter 1:18-19). The letter to the Hebrews informs us that Jesus **"was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"** (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus' miracles show that He is merciful. Peter summarized Jesus ministry by saying that He **"went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil"** (Acts 10:38).

God's grace, His undeserved love, is shown us by what Jesus has done. Jesus came to our world. He lived a perfect life in our place and died the death we deserved to die. Jesus voluntarily lived and died for us, as was foretold: **"In the scroll of the book it is written of Me. I delight to do Your will, O My God, and Your law is within My heart"** (Psalm 40:7-8). Even though He knew how great and painful His suffering would be, Jesus prayed to His Father in Gethsemane: **"Not My will, but Yours, be done"** (Luke 22:42). The apostle Paul wrote: **"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for Your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich"** (2 Corinthians 8:9). **"In Him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"** (Ephesians 1:7).

## Questions

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1. Why is it so important for our salvation that Jesus is God?
2. What attributes of God are also found in Jesus?
3. What do these attributes prove about Jesus?
4. Which passage showing that Jesus is eternal would be most meaningful for the people living in your area?
5. What did Jesus mean when He said His Father was working, and He was working?
6. Why can we be sure that Jesus' predictions concerning the future will come true?
7. In what way is Jesus present with us as both God and man?
8. Why is it important for us that Jesus was holy all His life?
9. What passages show that Jesus is merciful and gracious?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.3.3 – The Doctrine of God

### Jesus Is God – He Is Given Divine Names and Divine Honor

The Holy Scriptures call God many times. The Bible calls Jesus not only the Son of God, but also simply God. The apostle John begins his Gospel by talking about the **“Word.”** This **“Word”** is clearly Jesus, for later John says: **“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14). This is what John says about Jesus, the Word: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”** (John 1:1). To be God and to be with God at the same time establishes that there are at least two distinct entities that are God: The Word that was made flesh, and the one He was with.

At first, Thomas did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But when Jesus appeared to His disciples a week after His resurrection, He said to Thomas: **“Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side”** (John 20:27). Thomas then believed and called Jesus: **“My Lord and my God!”** (John 20:28).

The apostle Paul said that Jesus is God in his words to the Ephesian elders when he met them at Miletus: **“Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”** (Acts 20:28). The **“He”** refers to God and yet at the same time refers to Jesus who purchased His Church with His own blood. Paul said the same thing in his letter to the Romans when he wrote this about the Israelites: **“Of whom (that is, the Israelites) are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God”** (Romans 9:5). According to the flesh Jesus came from the Israelites, because He had a Jewish mother, but, at the same time, He was and is **“the eternally blessed God.”**

Jesus Himself taught that He, as the Son of God, was worthy of the same honor as the Father: **“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him”** (John 5:22-23). For this very reason, Jesus accepted the worship given to Him by His followers. After Jesus quieted the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee by merely speaking a word: **“Those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God’”** (Matthew 14:33).

Jesus is continually worshiped as God in heaven. In Revelation, the apostle John was allowed to hear this song of worship from the angels, the elders, and the creatures: **“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! ... Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”** (Revelation 5:12-13).

### Questions

1. How does John 1:1 prove that Jesus is God?
2. When was Thomas willing to call Jesus his God?
3. How is it possible for God to shed His own blood?
4. What job did the Father give to Jesus so that all would honor Jesus as God?
5. How does Revelation 5 prove that Jesus is God?





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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.4 – The Doctrine of God

### The Holy Spirit Is Also God – His Names, Attributes, and Works

There are many who believe and teach that the Holy Spirit is a force and not a person. But the Bible clearly teaches that the Spirit is a Person who is God, just as the Father and the Son are persons who are God. For example, before His death, Jesus told his disciples that the Father would send them another Comforter or Counselor: **“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth...The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:16, 26). Jesus clearly speaks of the Holy Spirit as a Person, not as an impersonal force.

In the early church at Jerusalem, the apostle Peter exposed Ananias and his wife Sapphira, as hypocrites. In his rebuke, Peter declared that the Holy Spirit is God: **“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...You have not lied to men, but to God”** (Acts 5:3-4).

The apostle Paul likewise understood the Holy Spirit to be God, for he wrote to the Christians in Corinth: **“The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God”** (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). No one knows the deep things of God except God Himself. Later in this same letter, Paul talks about the spiritual gifts of God and says that they are gifts from all three Persons of the Trinity: The Lord (Jesus), God (the Father), and the Spirit: **“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all”** (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Paul proclaims the same three Persons of God in apostolic blessing: **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all”** (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Holy Spirit has divine attributes. In the Old Testament, King David spoke of the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit: **“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?”** (Psalm 139:7). The letter to the Hebrews declares the Spirit to be **“eternal”** (Hebrews 9:14).

The Holy Spirit does divine works. The Bible makes it clear that the Holy Spirit was involved in such divine works as creation, redemption, the calling of pastors, and guiding the Church.

At creation, **“the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”** (Genesis 1:2). Elihu, Job’s young friend, correctly said: **“The Spirit of God has made me”** (Job 33:4).

The Holy Spirit also was involved in the work of redemption. The angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary: **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God”** (Luke 1:35). In His ministry, Jesus was **“filled with the Holy Spirit”** and was **“led by the Spirit”** (Luke 4:1).

Finally, Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize all nations **“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (Matthew 28:19). It is clear that Jesus considered the Holy Spirit to be a being on the same level as the Father and the Son. Therefore, if the Father is God and the Son is God, it is clear that the Holy Spirit also is God and He does the works of God.

## Questions

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1. Why can we be sure that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force?
2. How does the Biblical account of Ananias and Sapphira show that the Holy Spirit is God?
3. In what way is the Trinity depicted in 2 Corinthians 13:14?
4. What the divine attributes are attributed to the Holy Spirit?
5. How was the Holy Spirit active in the works of creation and redemption?
6. Why is the Holy Spirit called the Third Person of the Triune God?



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## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.5 – The Doctrine of God

### The Relationship of the Three Persons in the Trinity

As we have seen, the Bible clearly teaches that there is one God and yet there are three separate entities that are called God. In the sixth or seventh century, the church wrote the *Athanasian Creed* in order to combat the false teachers who denied the Trinity and to clearly set out the Bible's teaching that there is one God in three Persons. The *Athanasian Creed* emphasizes the oneness of the Deity and at the same time the distinct differences between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance... The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God – and yet there are not three gods but one God" (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 24). Each Person is 100% God and 100% of God is in each Person. "For in Him (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 1:19).

The Bible uses different terms for the relationship of the three Persons of God to one other. The Son is called "the only begotten" (John 1:18). If the Son is the begotten one, the Father must be the One who begets. This must, of course, be a different kind of begetting than that found among humans. In the case of human beings, a father is, of course, older than his son. But in the Trinity both the Father and the Son are eternal. So, we say with Martin Luther that we believe that Jesus Christ, true God, is "begotten of the Father in eternity" (*Luther's Small Catechism*, explanation to the second article of the Apostle's Creed).

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is "the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father" (John 15:26). Since the Holy Spirit is also called "the Spirit of His Son" (Galatians 4:6), we confess in the *Nicene Creed* that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son" (*The Book of Concord*, p. 23).

The *Athanasian Creed* summarizes these teachings by saying: "The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is from the Father alone, not made or created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made or created or begotten but proceeding" (*The Book of Concord*, p. 24).

### Some False Teachings about God

In the history of the Christian church on earth many teachers have arisen who have denied the Trinity. Both Muslims and Jews teach that there is one God but they reject the teaching that the Son is God or that the Holy Spirit is God. Some have taught that there is only one Person of God, appearing at times as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Holy Spirit. They teach that God the Father was crucified.

The *Nicene Creed* was written to oppose to the teachings of Arius. Arius taught that there was a time when there was no Son of God. He denied the eternity and the full deity of Jesus.

Today, many Christian teachers and leaders are really Unitarians rather than Trinitarians, because they deny the full deity of Jesus or His bodily resurrection from the dead that proves Him to be true God. Among the Pentecostalists there is at least one anti-Trinitarian group that teaches that Jesus is God but they deny the Trinity. Jehovah's Witnesses also deny the deity of Jesus. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons) teach that the Father, Son, and Spirit are really three separate gods, and that Mormons can become gods as well.

Another false teaching of our time is known as “process theology”. According to this teaching God is limited in understanding and power. He is in a process of growing or evolving and does not fully know what the future will bring.

There are also feminists who reject the use of the word “He” in the Bible to refer to God. They say we should say “she” instead. They call God their Mother or their Father-Mother. Some consider Earth or Nature as their Mother God. Although we realize that God is not a sexual Being, like most of His animal creatures, the language used uniformly by the Bible leads us to speak of God as “He”. This includes of all the three Persons of God.

### **God’s Revelation of Himself**

Everything we can know about God has been revealed to us by God Himself in the holy Scriptures. It is from the Scriptures we learn that there is only one God in three Persons. If we could fully understand how this can be, or if we can fully understand the inner workings of the three Persons in God, we would be equal to God ourselves. We must remain humble and simply accept what God has revealed about Himself without doubting or questioning.

Above all, we rejoice in the fact that this one true God in three Persons is our Savior. He has revealed Himself as the Trinity in connection with His plan of salvation. He has revealed himself as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. As soon as the first human sin occurred, God immediately came with His promise of a Savior (Genesis 3:15). All of His revelation in Scripture carries forward this same theme, all the way to the last verse of Revelation.

### **Questions**

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1. Which of the three ancient creeds goes into the most detail on the Trinity?
2. What word does the Bible use to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son?
3. What word does the Bible use to describe the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son?
4. What are some of the false-teaching groups that deny the Trinity?
5. Which of these groups has the greatest influence in your area?
6. Why do we use masculine pronouns when we speak about God?
7. In what way does process theology contradict Bible teaching?