

# *The Sovereignty of God*

W.E. Best



Distributed freely by

*Spring Assembly of Christ*

November 2015

## GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Thine, O Lord, *is* the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; thine *is* the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all (I Chron. 29:11).

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

But he *is* in one *mind*, and who can turn him? and *what* his soul desireth, even *that* he doeth (Job 23:13).

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11).

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1).

...I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Dan. 4:34, 35).

God's sovereignty rests at the foundation of all Christian theology. If the foundation of a building is faulty, the whole superstructure is defective. Since theology is the science of God, there must be the right concept of God at the foundation of all Biblical teaching. An unscriptural conception of God leads to erroneous views of the other Biblical sciences--anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. How can the superstructure be sound if the foundation is defective?

The supreme purpose of the Bible is to reveal to God's elect their *Creator, Redeemer, and Preserver* (John 17). Man is surrounded by a universe that is mysterious and wonderful. He has used aids to probe his environment. Telescopes have carried man's gaze into the recesses of space; giant rockets have carried man as far as the moon; microscopes have revealed many mysteries of infinitesimal things. God, however, continues to be unseen by man. Man, with all his modern technology, has discovered a universe filled with evidences of design; but he has not found the Designer. Zophar, the so-called friend of Job, said, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto

perfection?" (Job 11:7). This was the most excellent part of Zophar's address; he associated Divine wisdom with God Almighty, but he did not apply it to Christ. No man can find God until God, by His sovereign will, chooses to reveal Himself (Matt. 11:25-27). God is savingly revealed in Christ (II Cor. 4:6).

Professor Robert Smith Candlish (1806-?) has given us a remarkable chapter on *Creation Viewed as a Matter of Faith*:

The fact of the creation is regarded in the Bible as a fact revealed; and, as such, it is commended to our faith. Thus the scriptural method of this subject is exactly the reverse of what is called the natural. It is not to ascend from nature up to nature's God (as Rom. 1:19, 20), but to descend, if we may so speak, from God to God's nature, or His works of nature; not to hear the Creator speaking of the creation.... God Himself appears, and tells us authoritatively who He is, and what He has done, and why He did it.... When I draw inferences for myself concerning the Author of creation,--when I reason out from His works the fact of His existence, and the chief attributes of His character,--I am conscious of a certain feeling of superiority. The Deity becomes almost, in a certain sense, my creature,--the product of my own elaborated process of thought. I am occupied more with my own reasonings than with the transcendent excellencies of Him of whom I reason.... But now, God speaks, and I am dumb. He opens His mouth, and I hold my peace. I now at once recognize a real and living Person, beyond and above myself. Now in very truth my 'faith' does become 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'

Some are trying to interpret the infinite God by their finite understanding. If God could be understood by man's finite mind, He would cease to be God. The very idea of God postulates infinity, which is beyond reach of man's utmost understanding. Who would think of measuring the Pacific Ocean with a thimble, or the surface of the earth with a foot rule. Though men had nothing to say about their presence in this world, neither can they order their own affairs (Prov. 16:33); yet they presume to sketch for themselves a picture of God. Their image of God is commensurate with the dimensions of their own understanding; therefore, they establish for themselves standards by which they propose that God Himself shall be regulated.

We need an adequate idea of God. How can we form a suitable or sufficient conception of God? Such knowledge of God may be had only as believers yield heart and mind to the revelation God makes of Himself in the Bible. General revelation alone is not sufficient (Rom. 1:19-21). We must not try to stretch our little rule upon the Divine sceptre; neither should we assume that our little reason is competent to write a constitution which is to control the sovereign God of the universe. What folly for us to form a human constitution to which the sovereign God

shall be subject. Do we not see the stupidity of this in so many so-called church covenants and constitutions today?

I. Sovereignty is Divine control.

A. Sovereignty means that there is no power in the spiritual world among principalities and rulers, no power in human society among political leaders, and no power in any individual human life that is not subject to Divine control. If there were one infinitesimal spot any place in the universe where any power could challenge the supremacy of God, God must cease to be sovereign; moreover, He must cease to be God.

1. God has power to triumph over principalities and powers and openly manifest their defeat. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Jesus Christ was given power over all flesh to assure the deliverance of the elect (John 17:2).
2. God has power over the political rulers of this world.

... there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1).

... the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Dan. 4:25).

The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will (Prov. 21:1).

The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ...For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done(Acts 4:26,28).

Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above... (John 19:11).

For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled(Rev. 17:17).

In the light of these verses, God gives power to *whomsoever He will*, turns men's hearts *whithersoever He will*, and does *whatsoever His hand and counsel have foreordained*.

3. God rules and governs all His creatures by His sovereign power. In God all men live, move, and have their being (Acts 17:28). He is the Preserver of beasts as well as men. "Thou, *even* thou, *art* Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee" (Neh. 9:6).

"The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God" (Ps. 104:21).

- B. Sovereignty signifies that God not only has power over all things, but He has authority over all things. *Power* and *authority* have been distinguished as follows: Power refers to the *strength* of God, whereby He is able to effect His purpose; authority denotes His *right* to act as He pleases. Omnipotence is God's physical power that enables Him to do what He will; dominion is His moral power that makes it lawful for Him to do what He will. There is a threefold dominion of God.
1. God's *natural* dominion is founded in the nature of God as Creator. His dominion is absolute over all creatures (Rev. 4:11; Ps.135:6).
  2. God's *spiritual* dominion is founded in the eternal covenant of grace. His dominion is absolute over all the elect (John 17).
  3. God's *glorious* dominion will be the absolute consummation of all things in the reign of Christ eternally in the kingdom.

## II. Sovereignty is absolute control.

The word *absolute* has been used unwisely by all; but when we consider its meaning, we will be more careful about its future use. When questioned about your assurance of something, have you ever replied, *absolutely*?

- A. *Absolute* is an immeasurable word. It is a word that cannot define qualities which may be included in any category of human values. People may be staggered with the astronomer's figures, with the stellar specialist's light years, and with the geologist's computation of millions and billions of years, until they grow dizzy trying to solve the riddles. All of those elements together do not constitute the infinite or absolute.
- B. Absolute is a term which denotes the essence of Deity. *The Absolute is God*. He is the *Last*, the *Final*, the *Utmost*, the *Ultimate*, and the *Infinite*. If we can perceive God as absolute, we will not try to enclose Him to the dimensions of our finite understanding. Time registers with us because it is a span or a measure. The frequently used statement "There is plenty of time" is true with God, but not with men. There is a time to be born, and there is a time to die (Eccl. 3:2). There is something within us that limits our views and makes time a factor. It is not so with God; He is timeless because He is eternal.

## III. The sovereign God does as He pleases.

And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Dan. 4:35).

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11).

- A. God governs the affairs of men. Like the Puritans, we believe that every thought and action of every man is with the concurrent knowledge and will of God.
  - 1. God is able to either restrain man from sinning or let him do the evil that is in his heart. For instance, God did not restrain Adam from sinning, but He did Abimelech (Gen.3; 20:6).
  - 2. God alone prompts every right act that man performs (Phil. 2:12, 13).
  
- B. Man is rational but not free. We often hear it said that man is the captain of his own soul; he is the master of his fate. If man is the captain of his own soul, he surely is misusing his captaincy. No person in his right mind would pit his judgment against God's. Only a merciful providence shuts the door of the asylum and leaves us outside. When a person is sick, he uses the doctor's skill. When he flies on an airplane, he leaves the piloting of the plane to the flight captain and crew. Will the same man, who is nothing but a midget, tell the sovereign God what He can and cannot do? The only time Nebuchadnezzar was ever really great was when he bowed before the sovereign God (Dan. 4:34-37).
  - 1. Freedom is the capacity to fulfill one's destiny without external constraint. It is not the ability to do whatsoever he pleases. If that were true, no one is free. I might please to go to the moon, but it is not in my power to get there. As the train was made for tracks, fish for water, and man for the earth, so man is made for the laws of God. Man's rational nature distinguishes him from a mere object; therefore, he is not a puppet.
  - 2. True freedom is found only within the context of Divine authority (John 8:36; I Cor. 7:22).

## GOD IS SUPREME

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect (Gen. 17:1).

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by *the name of* God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them (Ex. 6:3).

*Touching* the Almighty, we cannot find him out: *he is* excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict (Job 37:23).

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (Rev. 1:8).

I recently heard an irrational preacher on the radio say, "That hell damning doctrine of God's sovereignty has been popular for years. God is not going to do any more about the devil than He has already done. He has turned man loose after giving him power; now it is man's responsibility to fight the devil." Such a statement as this is nothing short of blasphemy--the crime of assuming to oneself the rights or qualities of God. Let it be clearly understood that no person can rationally answer irrational persons.

There is nothing as uncomfortable as a distinct truth that demands decision. The clear-cut scriptural fact of God must be either accepted or rejected. God is either God over all or He is no God at all. Few tasks are more difficult than answering these simple questions: Who is God? What is God like? Asking the questions presupposes that rational beings are capable of some knowledge of God. The Psalmist felt that God's existence was so clearly seen through general revelation that only a fool would say "...*There is no God...*" (Ps. 14:1).

There are several degrees of atheism. There is a *dogmatic atheism*. The person who holds this view adopts, in advance of evidence, a position that rules out any serious contemplation of God's existence. The *general revelation* of God in the works of creation is to be distinguished from the *special revelation* of God in Jesus Christ. When we consider general revelation, a knowledge of salvation is not the question. It is a natural knowledge which every rational man gets through the medium of created reality, a knowledge which leaves him without excuse (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19, 20). The limits of this knowledge must be constantly observed. Man knows, by general revelation, that God possesses certain perfections, such as eternal power and Godhead; but he does not know how God possesses these perfections. There is the atheism that rises from *an agnostic spirit*. The agnostic is one who holds that the ultimate cause and the essential nature of things are not only unknown but unknowable. Agnosticism is an intellectual doctrine or attitude offering the uncertainty of all claims to ultimate knowledge. Now, you have a good idea of what modern day intellectualism means--the excessive emphasis on abstract matters. There is also an atheism which is synonymous with *antitheism*. This includes everything which fails in some essential element of a clear Theism. Antitheism includes pantheism

(identifies God with the universe), polytheism (many gods), tritheism (three gods in the Godhead), and deism (God, who created the world, has since remained indifferent to His creation). The final stage of atheism is called *practical*. It is expressed by persons who say there is a God but live as though He does not exist. Every man under the canopy of heaven classifies himself by lip and life.

If God's sovereignty is not embraced in a way of dependence, then there is no hope in a way of spiritual favor. Prayer, for example, is an expression of need; it recognizes that the remedy comes from God alone. That is recognition of sovereignty. Prayer is an acknowledgment of God's dominion. Such acknowledgment is humbling. It gives a true view of God's majesty and man's nothingness, which teaches reverence. Is it any wonder that men who deny God's will in the matter of prayer, also deny His sovereignty, and manifest no respect for His holiness?

Reverence for God is recognition of His greatness. The highest greatness is entitled to the deepest reverence. Every age has its moral tastes as well as its religious, social, and political tastes; but reverence is not one of the most cherished virtues of this age. The Psalmist, in speaking of God, said, "...holy and reverend *is* his name..." (Ps. 111:9). Job said, "Behold, *in* this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters" (Job 33:12,13). God's greatness is not to be understood as referring to His power only but also to all His attributes, such as His truth, wisdom, justice, goodness, mercy, love, etc. God is *great* without measure--*good* without degree--*everlasting* without time--*omnipresent* without place--*omnipotent* without help. He contains all without extent. God is *great*: "Thy way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary: who *is* so great a God as *our* God? (Ps. 77:13). He is greater than the greatest: "For the Lord *is* a great God, and a great King above all gods" (Ps. 95:3). He is *greatness* itself: "Great *is* the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness *is* unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3).

Since God is God, no power in heaven or on the earth or under the earth can challenge Him. If there were such a power that could challenge God, then God would not be God. The Christian believes that the attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience enrich the Biblical doctrine of God as sovereign Lord. (Study Ps. 139.) They are part of the conception of the Being Who is God. God is sovereignly free; He is above any determination outside Himself. He existed before the creation of the world, and He in no way is dependent upon it. Therefore, the God of the Bible is supreme in both the means and end of the exercise of His will.

Someone stood on the ocean beach and observed the incoming tide. Wave after wave broke on the sands, but the tide came in on schedule. The man, after observing the waves and tide, wrote the following poem.

O mighty sea, thy message in changing spray is cast:  
Within God's plan of progress it matters not at last,  
How wide the shores of evil, how strong the reefs of sin;  
The wave may be defeated but the tide is sure to win.

I. God is omnipresent.



But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? (I Kings 8:27).

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. If I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me (Ps. 139:7-10).

Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord (Jer. 23:24).

- A. Omnipresence means that God is infinite.
  - 1. Infinity signifies without bounds or limits. Since God is infinite, there is no place where He does not exist.
    - a. This condemns the modern thought that renders belief in God *up there* or *out there* absurd. The modern view of God advocates that the only alternative for the educated man is to believe in a god inside man's own being.
    - b. This theory about God denies His omnipresence and providence.
  - 2. Infinity is one of God's perfections.
    - a. As eternity is the perfection whereby God has neither beginning nor ending, so omnipresence is that perfection whereby God is neither bound nor limited.
    - b. Instead of asking, Where is God? the question should be, Where is God not?
- B. Omnipresence means that God is in every minute part of the universe.
  - 1. There is an *essential* presence of God with all creatures (Acts 17:24-28).
    - a. God is not only the originator but the sustainer of life.
    - b. God is present with evil as well as righteous persons. The wicked, as well as the righteous, are sustained by God's essential presence.
  - 2. There is a *particular* presence of God in the saved (Eph. 1:3-6; Col. 1:27).
    - a. This presence is by the grace of the sovereign God.
    - b. This presence had an actual beginning in regeneration but shall never have an ending (John 10:28-30).
  - 3. There is a *providential* presence of God in the world (Prov. 16:1-4, 9, 33; Is. 45:7).
    - a. Providence must be distinguished from creation. Creation is the doctrine of origins; providence is the doctrine of preservation and government.
    - b. God is not the author of sin. Sin came not from creation but from the fall of man. The withdrawal of light leaves nothing but darkness, but it would be absurd to say that the light caused the darkness.
  - 4. There is a *justifiable* presence of God in the wicked.
    - a. They cannot escape the Divine Avenger. The wicked, according to Revelation 6, would rather die than face God in His majesty.

- b. The wicked in hell will know they are receiving the due reward of their deeds.

NOTE: It has been said that God is in all creatures as their *preserver*, in His people as their *protector*, and in the damned as their *terror*. God is in the world, yet not confined to it. He is out of the world, yet not debarred from it. He is above the world, yet not elevated by it.

## II. God is omnipotent.

God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power *belongeth* unto God (Ps. 62:11).

Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee (Jer. 32:17).

And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Dan. 4:35).

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

- A. God's power is infinite (Eph. 1:19).
1. God could not be omnipotent unless His power were infinite.
  2. Infinite power consists in bringing things forth from the womb of nothing.
- B. God's power is His ability to act.
1. God's will orders the action.
  2. God's wisdom directs the action.
  3. God's power effects the action.
- C. God's power is inexhaustible.
1. Nothing lies outside God's capability except the self-contradictory or the morally hurtful.
  2. God's power is divided into absolute and ordinate. Absolute power is God's ability to do what He will not do; ordinate power is God's capability of doing that which He decreed to do. Both absolute and ordinate power are revealed in Matthew 26: 53,54. God's absolute power is demonstrated in the fact that the Father could have sent twelve legions of angels to protect Christ. The question "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" applies to ordinate power. What is authority without power?

## III. God is omniscient.

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:18).

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off (Ps. 139:2).

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out (Rom. 11:33).

- A. God's understanding is *infinite* (Ps. 147:5).
  - 1. God knows all things by one act of intuition. There is no division in God. He is independent of any reasoning process.
  - 2. God's knowledge is not successive; it is simultaneous. Thomas Manton said, "A man that stands by a river in a certain place can see only that part of the river that passes by; but he that is aloft in the air, in a higher place, may see the whole course, where it rises and how it runs. So God at one view sees the beginning and ending of actions. Whatever we think, speak, or do, God sees it altogether."
- B. God's knowledge is *eternal*.
  - 1. God sees future, present, and past all at once because there is no time with Him.
  - 2. There is no succession in God's knowledge. That which is future to man is a present fact to God. All things have, with respect to God, a *known* and a *real* existence. Both are known at the same time because God is eternal.
- C. God's knowledge is *perfect*.
  - 1. God cannot be deceived because He is truth.
  - 2. God cannot deceive because He is wisdom.
- D. God's knowledge is *pure*.
  - 1. It cannot be contaminated with an object.
  - 2. No evil can mix with His knowledge any more than the sun can be defiled with the vapors which rise from the earth.

GOD IS GOD  
(Is. 40:12-31)

The *god* of this century no more resembles the *supreme* Sovereign of scripture than the dim flickering of a candle resembles the glory of the midday sun. Heathen outside of professing Christendom have their *gods* of wood and stone. They are no different from heathen within professing Christendom who have a *god* manufactured out of their depraved minds.

A common expression often heard in the religious community is *Let God be God!* This statement only manifests the Biblical ignorance that is so prevalent today. How can man, who without the power of God can do nothing, let God be God? Christ said to Pilate, "...Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above..." (John 19:11). How can man who lives and moves in God let God be God? In his message on Mars' Hill Paul said, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). How can the effect let the cause be the cause of the effect? John said, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). Who ever heard of effect letting cause be cause?

In one of the letters to Erasmus, Martin Luther said, "Your thoughts of God are too human." Probably that renowned scholar resented such a rebuke; nevertheless, it was thoroughly deserved. Of old, God complained to Israel, "...thou thoughtest that I was altogether *such an one* as thyself..." (Ps. 50:21). Such must be God's indictment against professing Christendom. Most religionists imagine that the Most High is moved by sentiment rather than principle. They suppose that God's power is so weak that Satan thwarts His purpose. They think that God's will is to save every man without exception, but many men, by their unbelief, are defeating His purpose. They assume that God's plan must, like theirs, be constantly subject to change. The spiritual ignorance of men is displayed when the depraved scale of man's measurement is employed to measure the infinite God. How utterly impossible it is for a creature to bring his Creator under his obligations. All Christians feel as Paul did when it comes to explaining the ways of God. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

God's supremacy is the Divine purpose exercised without *control*, *constraint*, or *condition*. An understanding of God's sovereignty is the foundation of Christianity. God must be constantly viewed upon the throne of His eternal purpose. His determinate counsel underlies all His acts. Job said, "But he *is* in one *mind*, and who can turn him? and *what* his soul desireth, even *that* he doeth" (Job 23:13). There can never be a new thought or purpose in God any more than there can be a new God. Whatever He purposed in eternity, He purposes in time. His purpose, therefore, is fixed and settled. This is the reason Paul called it "...the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11).

The *eternal purpose* of God carries the same connotation as *He is in one mind* (Eph. 3:11; Job 23:13). The thoughts of God are all reducible (treated as a complex idea) to one mind. They are not successively formed

as the emergency arises; they are all parts of one comprehending mind. God does not think like man; He thinks *simultaneously*. Man thinks *successively*. Jonathan Edwards said, "God does not do what He does, nor order what He orders accidentally and unawares; either without or beside His intention. And if there is a foregoing design of doing and ordering as He does, this is the same with a purpose or decree." The finite mind of man cannot understand the infinite mind of God; consequently, man's chief concern is to be given to God's commands. God's purpose will be revealed in time. Habakkuk said, "And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab. 2:2,3).

God's purpose is called eternal because it preceded time. Before time there was only measureless duration, inhabited by the sovereign God. The Psalmist said, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God" (Ps. 90:2). "Thy throne *is* established of old: thou *art* from everlasting" (Ps. 93:2). Isaiah said, "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God" (Is. 44:6). Since time is limited or measured duration, then unlimited duration is eternity. The fact that God is in one mind and eternal establishes the truth of His eternal decree.

The term *decree* is an attempt to gather into *one designation* all the various designations, such as *purpose* (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11; 3:11), *determinate counsel* (Acts 2:23), *foreknowledge* (foreordination) (I Pet. 1:2,20), *election* (I Thess. 1:4; Eph. 1:4), *predestination* (Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:5,11), and the Divine *good pleasure* (Eph. 1:9). The proof of God's decree is learned from the nature and perfections of God. He is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and immutable. These perfections prove and protect God's purpose. He is *omniscient*; nothing takes Him by surprise. He is *omnipotent*; nothing can thwart His purpose. He is *omnipresent*; nothing can slip up on Him. He is *unchangeable*; nothing can cause Him to change His mind (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). If any thing is by chance or the mere effect of second causes, one cannot truthfully say, "For *of* him (in creation), and *through* him (in providence), and *to* him (directed and ordered to His glory), *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

The *extent* of the decree covers everything from eternity past, through time, throughout eternity future--when time shall be no more (Rev. 10:6). God's decree is unchangeable: there will be no alteration in the Divine *intention*; no new act shall arise in the Divine *mind*; and there shall be no reversion of the Divine *purpose*. Hence, the God of the Christian is *absolutely* sovereign, *infallibly* wise, *authoritatively* omnipotent, and *supremely* immutable.

#### I. God's eternal purpose is without *control*.

It has been said that a servant may fulfill his master's command willingly, but he does not do so of his own good pleasure. The Christian performs the will of God freely, but he does not execute it of his own arbitrary will. The will of the Christian is under the

direction of God's will (Ps. 110:3; Phil. 2:12,13). This, however, could never be true of God. His will does not depend on the will of the creature. The will of the creature depends on the will of the Creator.

A. The will of God is *independent*.

1. Independence, in reference to God's will, means that it rotates on its own axis--operates on its own purpose and pleasure. For instance, God willed to create; therefore, He created. His will to create was not dependent on but independent of His creation. If God's will is dependent upon the will of His creatures now--as free-will religionists believe--then upon what was His will dependent before creation? A sincere desire to know the truth is a quality that rarely exists among professing Christians.
2. God's will is the first, not the second, in movement. His will is fixed and irresistible; it stands the same from everlasting to everlasting. Paul said, "...being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

B. The will of God is *absolute*.

1. It is independent of any arbitrary standard set by depraved man. God is His own standard. Man's will is dependent on God's will. Thus, man's enslaved will is dependent on God's sovereign will.
2. God's will is perfect in saving some and damning others. Paul said, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he *will have* mercy and whom he *will* he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18).

II. God's eternal purpose is without *constraint*.

A person may do something voluntarily, yet he is constrained to a degree. He may choose to perform a deed, but he does it out of fear. This cannot be true of God because it is His prerogative to do what He pleases, when He pleases, and to whom He pleases. Therefore, what He does is according to the *good pleasure of His will* (Eph. 1:5).

A. There is nothing in man to constrain God to act in his favor.

1. A sinner deserves nothing but condemnation from the sovereign God. God takes the sinner He wills to save from the lump of depravity and makes him a vessel of mercy (Rom. 9:21).
2. A sinner has no righteous claim upon God's mercy. Thus God justly takes another sinner fitted to destruction, like Pharaoh, and uses him to manifest His wrath, power, and long-suffering (Rom. 9:22).

B. There is nothing outside of God to compel Him to act.

1. God cannot be embarrassed; therefore, He has nothing to fear from man.
2. The sovereign God is not restricted to do what man wants Him to.

III. God's eternal purpose is without *condition*.

A person may do something, which he is obligated to accomplish, but he cannot be said to act from his own pleasure and will. The man who acts from obligation is not free; he is bound to the obligation. An individual may be given the right to do some things according to his pleasure, but his right is not absolute. Man's right to do anything is limited because it is granted by the sovereign God. God is sovereign; He is absolute and unlimited. He has the right to do what He will with His own. Christ said, in the parable of the householder, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I *will* with mine own?" (Matt. 20:15).

- A. God's will is not subject to man's will.
  - 1. The free-will doctrine reverses the Divine order. Persons who hold to this doctrine advocate that God can do nothing for man, until man is willing for God to help him.
  - 2. The free-will doctrine makes God, instead of the sinner, the beggar. This is heresy.
- B. God's will is unconditional.
  - 1. God's will and purpose are unilateral--not bilateral. He alone is capable of making and maintaining His purpose.
  - 2. The very thing that men quarrel about with God is that which they love in themselves. Every man likes to feel that he has a right to do as he pleases with his own.

GOD IS GLORIOUS  
(Ps. 29; Rom. 16:25-27)

The besetting sin of every Christian is the failure to "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name..." (Ps. 29:2). Such failure is expected among the unsaved, but it should not be among the saved. Scientists, when sweeping the heavens with telescopic vision and examining samples of the lunar surface brought back by the astronauts, forget Who created and sustains the planetary system. Statesmen, when dealing with matters pertaining to governments, forget that there is no power but of God. Philosophers, who delve into the reasoning of men, become wise in their own conceits; thus, they forget that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. Physicians, while probing deeper into the science of medicine, are prone to overlook the fact that Jesus Christ is the great Physician. Preachers, who become so entangled with the present day promotional scheme, deify the means and forget the end. Christians, in general, are so enmeshed in a complex society that they lose sight of the purpose of all their efforts--the glory of God.

"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name"...(Ps. 29:2). The word *give* means ascribe. The creatures of God cannot confer anything upon God; furthermore, God's name is above all praise. "Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory *is* above the earth and heaven" (Ps. 148:13). Though God's name is above all praise, the creature's responsibility to strive to praise Him is not lessened. This can be illustrated by perfection in the Christian life. Even though no believer can attain perfection in this life, he can, like Paul, follow after it. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14). David used the word *give* three times in the first two verses of Psalm 29. He besought the mighty men, men who are prone to ascribe power and glory to themselves, to ascribe both glory and strength to the self-existent God. Dependence upon God must be acknowledged by presidents and peons alike.

The key word in our present study is *glory*, glory as it pertains to the sovereign God. The *glory of God* is the majesty and splendor attendant upon a manifestation of God. Glory is God's right; consequently, the sincere believer is to ascribe to God His absolute right. This ascription of glory to God by the Christian is not what it should be, but he groans under his failures as he sincerely undertakes to exalt God in the world. As the saint of God ascribes unto the Lord the glory due His name, he realizes this is the way to defeat low and base motives.

Psalm 29 opens with the summons to the *mighty* to ascribe unto the Lord glory and strength. The mighty men are the great men of the nations, especially the chiefs of Israel. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods...Ye *are* gods; and all of you *are* children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes" (Ps. 82:1,6,7). Glory is to be ascribed to Jehovah by commending His works of creation, acquiescing to His providence, and giving Him thanks



for both temporal and eternal blessings.

Only God, to whom glory and strength are to be ascribed, is to be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. Worship meant at first worth-ship, or the condition of being worthy. The beauty of holiness makes men worthy. What is holiness? Holiness is self-affirming purity; it is wholeness. Holy is essentially the same word as heal or whole. God only is absolutely holy because "There *is* none holy as the Lord..." (I Sam. 2:2). Christians, too, are holy; they have been made holy in the holiness of Christ. Paul said, "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (I Thess. 4:7). Again, the Scriptures state, "Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). The word translated *holiness* in these verses comes from the Greek which means sanctification. Sanctification is thus the state predetermined by God for believers. The Christian life is begun in sanctification, its course is pursued in sanctification, and it will be perfected in sanctification (Heb. 10:10, 14; I Cor. 1:2; John 17:17; I Thess. 4:3; I Thess. 3:13). Character is in view when holiness is mentioned in relation to both Christ and Christians. Holiness in the case of Jesus Christ is absolutely perfect; whereas, holiness in relation to Christians is growing toward perfection. The best worship is not merely to thank God for what He has done for us, but to show ourselves worthy to praise Him. Such worship is not the manifestation of mere words but of character. For instance, a father would rather have his son say less about a sum of money he gave him, if he used it wisely, than have much praise for the gift and the son spend it unwisely. Spending the money wisely is a manifestation of character; whereas, spending the money in some degrading way is a manifestation of no character.

A most graphic description of the reigning Lord follows the admonition to ascribe glory and strength to Him. The voice of God is represented by the poetic illustration of thunder. There is no greater description of a thunderstorm in all literature, either secular or sacred. David's picture of the storm is set between two stanzas of two verses each. The first two verses give the introduction, and the last two give the conclusion. Between the introduction and the conclusion, God in heaven manifests His glory and power to people on earth. In the midst of the storm, God's people receive strength by viewing the rainbow of God's promise against the dark background of an awful storm. Thus, we have strength and peace for storm tossed souls.

Beneath the reverberations of the thunder, all living things shrink and tremble. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters--the symbol not only of peoples, nations, and tongues, but the very pathway of the Lord's people (Rev. 17:15; Is. 43:1,2). The voice of the Lord shattereth the strongest of trees, the cedars of Lebanon. Earth's strongest men are symbolized by trees (Dan. 4:10,14,20,23; Ezek. 31:3,18). The pride of mighty men, like Nebuchadnezzar and the Assyrian, shall be leveled to the ground. According to Ezekiel 31:3-9, such men are made great by the waters--the peoples of the world. Such men, therefore, are the people's choice. This brings to one's mind King Saul, who was the people's choice. In God's appointed time, Saul, like all men who are made great by men, was deposed. The time is coming when all the great men of the earth shall be leveled to nothing before the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Person of God's choice.

The shattering of the cedars of Lebanon is followed by a great shaking.

The mountains are made, as it were, to dance, so that the cedars whirl as the playthings of children. Persons who have gone through an earthquake know the terror that strikes the hearts of men when the earth shakes. The lightning blaze is referred to next. Both Sinai and Kadesh are mentioned. David said, "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: *even* Sinai itself *was moved* at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (Ps. 68:7,8). Kadesh was the terrible wilderness through which Israel passed on her way to Canaan. In their terror, the hinds are made to calve. The pains of parturition come upon them prematurely. The beasts of prey are driven forth from their hiding places, and their covert is concealed no longer.

There is a well-known line of poetry which says, "Look through nature up to nature's God." Natural science shows how the smallest and seemingly most insignificant events are all guided by the God of providence. Nothing is arbitrary or by chance. It has been said that smaller personalities appear kingly when the waters are smooth; they disappear at the flood. Military officers are very much alike when they are on the parade ground; their genius and quality are revealed on the battlefield. One of the great lines of the reformed confession states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." The person who realizes that his chief end is to glorify God sees a tranquil God ruling in the midst of a turbulent scene. The turbulent scene is a flood. A flood denotes commotion--socially, politically, and religiously. The Lord, however, is seen *sitting*. *Sitting* denotes tranquility. No usurper could be tranquil over such a tumultuous empire. The Creator and Sustainer of all things reigns supreme. He has no feeling of incapacity. His people, therefore, are at peace knowing that He has supremacy over the flood.

There is a threefold glory of God which I want to present in this message: (1) God's *creative* glory is revealed in the heavens (Ps. 19:1); (2) God's *redemptive* glory is revealed in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:6); (3) God's *eternal* glory shall be revealed to His saints (I Pet. 5:10).

- I. God's creative glory is revealed in the heavens. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1).
  - A. The heavens declare the glory of God.
    1. The *heavens* are plural for their variety. First, we have the heaven with its clouds. Secondly, there is the solar heaven with all the glories of the day, and the starry heaven with all the marvels of the night. Lastly, the Heaven of heavens cannot be explained by men because it speaks of the abode of God.
    2. The heavens *declare*, like a sheet of royal paper written all over with the wisdom and power of God, the glory of God. This declaration is to the enlightened mind an abiding reality. The Holy Spirit must illuminate us, or the Milky Way never will.
    3. Man, who was created upright, was made to scan the heavens. He who begins by studying the heavens begins the book of God's revelation at the right place (Gen. 1:1).
  - B. The firmament showeth His handiwork.

1. Nature does not contradict revelation. No one, therefore, is to be afraid to study the handiwork of God.
2. It has been said that the person who looks up to the firmament and says he is an atheist, brands himself at the same time as an idiot or a liar.

II. God's redemptive glory is revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4:6).

- A. God commanded corporeal (material) light to shine out of material darkness.
  1. There was darkness upon the earth as the result of a great catastrophe.
  2. Material light was the result of God's word of command, "... Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3).
- B. God commands spiritual light to shine in depraved hearts.
  1. Since God is the only Creator, He is the only Saviour.
  2. Paul gives the *source* (God hath shined), *place* (in our hearts), and *purpose* (to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ) of the shining of spiritual light.
  3. There is a sense in which spiritual light is greater than material light. In the first God spoke, but in the latter He became light for us. Paul does not say, *has now commanded* but has *Himself shined*.

III. God's eternal glory shall be revealed to His saints. "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you " (I Pet. 5:10).

- A. The verbs of I Peter 5:10 are future.
  1. God can be depended on to complete the salvation of His people (I Pet. 1:5,6).
  2. He is the God of all grace (of every grace--the manifold grace of God).
- B. Three great truths are asserted concerning the Divine calling.
  1. It is by Christ Jesus (in Christ).
  2. It is unto eternal glory.
  3. It will find its fulfillment after a period of suffering.

## GOD IS METHODOICAL

The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand (Is. 14:24).

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it (Is. 46:10,11).

The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations (Ps. 33:10,11).

*There are* many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand (Prov. 19:21).

*There is* no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord (Prov. 21:30).

The anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly (Jer. 23:20).

Who *is* he *that* saith, and it cometh to pass, *when* the Lord commandeth *it* not (Lam. 3:37).

For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:28).

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself (Eph. 1:9).

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:11).

Many years before the bottom fell out of civilization we heard much about the *inevitability of progress*. The only thing that seems unavoidable now is destruction. With the wisecracks of the twentieth century looking for dungeons in which to hide from their own inventions, it is evident that if this civilization is progressing it is in reverse. Modern civilization, instead of creating a millennium, is contriving a madhouse. Present-day conditions should cause professing Christendom to lead the way in a new examination and presentation of God's sovereignty.

There are many alarming cries being heard today, but God is not alarmed. Complaints about population explosion, air and water pollution, and ecological imbalance are not taking God by surprise. All things are

moving in accord with His eternal purpose; therefore, they are under His immediate control. We also hear warnings about communism and totalitarianism; but, once again, it must be said that God is not alarmed. The omniscient God has full knowledge of human rulers, whatever their character of rule. It must be acknowledged that they could accomplish nothing if God did not grant them the power (John 19:11; Rom. 13:1). They do not know it, but they are accomplishing God's purpose in the world. They are ruled by power behind their manifested power. There is a Person more than human behind persons who are purely human, and that Person is God.

God is in full control of every situation. God sits supreme, and by His determination of purpose He makes even those things that are opposed to Him serve His own purpose. The sovereign God harnesses the most wicked schemes of Satan to the wheel of His unchangeable purpose. An example of this fact is found in Genesis 50:19, 20. Joseph said to his brethren, "...Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive." There are many who acknowledge the fact of prescience (foreknowledge) but deny the equally Biblical fact of foreordination. When Joseph was sold by his brethren, he was in the place God appointed for him. His brethren thought they were doing him great evil, but God had ordained their act for the good of much people. God therefore decreed their act for good when they thought it was their own design for evil. The same truth is brought out in the death of Jesus Christ. Peter said in his message before the Jews, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Solomon said, "*There are* many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21). This means that no matter what man may devise, God executes His own purpose. Thus Solomon further stated, "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, *is* from the Lord" (Prov. 16:1). Daniel said of Belshazzar, "...and the God in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. 5:23).

The word *decree* is a technical term that has been adopted by men to convey a number of ideas by a single term. A decree is a determination, an edict, or a rule. It is an order by one having supreme authority, and he decides what is to be done. God's purpose is eternal because He is eternal. An alteration in the Divine purpose would necessitate an alteration in the Divine mind, which would be, in fact, to suppose a changeable God. God's immutability manifests the heresy of supposing that His will can be altered or changed. There is a difference between the purpose of God and the purpose of man. Man's purpose is distinct from himself, but God's purpose is not distinct from Himself.

The term *decree of God* is used in the singular, since God has but one all-inclusive plan. He sees all things simultaneously. He calls "those things that be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). For the convenience of our finite minds, the features of God's eternal purpose may be called the *decrees of God*. However, we must never make the mistake of thinking that the infinite understanding of God advances by steps. With God there is one eternal and immutable purpose embracing in itself every detail, even to the falling of a sparrow and the number of hairs on a person's head (Matt. 10:29, 30). God's eternal purpose is the Divine understanding

from all eternity. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them" (Is. 44:6,7).

The purpose of God was formed in eternity; its execution is in time. All the parts of God's purpose were known intuitively. They were independent of any reasoning process. On the other hand, the realization of the parts of God's purpose is successive. For example, the earthly mission of Jesus Christ was seen in one conception; the reason for this is the fact that God is in *one mind* (Job 23:13). However, we must not overlook the thirty-three year interval. There were many parts to God's purpose between the birth and death of Jesus Christ. Peter, in speaking about Christ's death, said, "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (I Pet. 1:20). Things that are successive to men are not successive to God. Future things in time do not coexist with God, but God coexists with them. There is no time with God; He is eternal. Eternal does not denote only pre-temporal. It also signifies co-temporal and post-temporal. Things future with men are present with God. As the present I AM of the Divine existence fills heaven and earth, so the present now of the Divine duration comprehends all time and eternity. The purpose of God accompanies and follows as well as precedes its fulfillment. God's purpose, therefore, cannot be regarded as a lifeless foreordination. It is as alive and relevant today as it was yesterday, and it will be as relevant tomorrow as it is today.

The purpose of God carries with it many parts; but, like the perfections of God, in itself it is one and supreme. There are many attributes but only one God; thus, there are many parts to God's eternal purpose but only one purpose. As God is revealed by His many attributes, so His purpose is manifested by its many parts. The extent of God's purpose covers everything from eternity past, through time, into the eternity future. Eternity and time are not to be compared to two parallel lines, one of which is shorter and exists for awhile and the other longer and extends indefinitely. Eternity is the unchangeable center which sends out rays to cover the whole contour of time. Time disappears into eternity at both ends like a rainbow. We can imagine neither a beginning nor an ending to time. During the period which men call time, the many parts of God's purpose are executed.

I. God's purpose is eternal (Eph. 3:11).

A. God is in one mind (Job 23:13).

1. As there are many pages but one book, so there are many parts to God's plan but one purpose.
2. In all the acts of providence, God has a fixed and settled purpose. He neither creates nor sustains His creatures without a purpose. Job said, "For he performeth *the thing that is* appointed for me..." (Job 23:14). (Study Rom. 8:28; II Tim. 1:9; Acts 26:16.)

B. God's one mind is eternally the same.

1. Whatever God purposes to do, He eternally purposed. God's determinate counsel underlies all His acts.
  2. There cannot be a new thought or intention with God any more than there can be a new God. God is eternally the same (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). Thus, He saw all His work brought to completion before He began it. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18); "...although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3).
- C. All things are eternally present to God.
1. Things future to men are present to God; He is eternal. There is no time with God.
  2. With God all things have both a *known* and a *real* existence at the same time. The reason for this is that the eternal God coexists with them. Even though real things that are future do not coexist with God, He does coexist with them. The Divine duration must be considered as wholly permanent and the ever present *now*. God's eternality is not capable of division into parts any more than the Divine existence itself is.

## II. God's purpose is infallible.

- A. Nothing can turn God (Job 23:13).
1. The great design of God cannot be overthrown. The purpose of God was not thrown out of order by the *fall*; neither was the *death* of Jesus Christ a Divine expedient (Rom. 5:12; I Cor. 15:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28).
  2. At the consummation, the picture will be exactly as God decreed it. The dark strokes of the brush in God's providential execution of His plan shall be overshadowed by the glorious consummation of His eternal purpose.
- B. God's immutability protects His purpose (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). God's purpose in both the incarnate and written Word shall be accomplished.
1. God's purpose in Christ shall be fulfilled. As all the prophecies concerning the first advent of Christ have been fulfilled, so the prophecies relating to His second advent shall be fulfilled. The devil--through Herod--tried to destroy Jesus Christ when He came the first time; but the record states, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him...and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:40, 52). Matthew says, "...for they are dead which sought the young child's life" (Matt. 2:20). All who run against God's purpose die; and, at the same time, those who go counter to God's purpose are fulfilling a minute part of that purpose. Little did proud Rome know, cultured Greece imagine, religious Israel suspect, and poor Nazareth dream that from the little village of Nazareth the greatest good known to mankind would come. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9).
  2. God's written word shall not return void (Is. 55:10,11). "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it

bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it." Herod, who sought to destroy Jesus Christ, died, yet the Lord Jesus grew and waxed strong. Another Herod tried to thwart God's message. He also died, but God's message lives on. "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:23, 24). Just as the rain and snow, in some cases, may become a curse and not a blessing, so God's word, in some cases, may harden and condemn and not save. "Now thanks *be* to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" (II Cor. 2:14-16).

### III. God purposed what His soul desired.

- A. God does not act arbitrarily in doing what He pleases.
  - 1. There is no purpose that precedes God's decree.
  - 2. God is His own law and standard.
- B. It is lawful for God to do what He pleases.
  - 1. Christ said, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matt. 20:15).
  - 2. The Apostle John said, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11).



GOD IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE  
(Rom. 11:33,34; Job 11:7)

We do not presume to completely understand either the being or attributes of God. Paul said, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Rom. 11:33,34). Zophar, one of Job's professed friends, said, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7). The Scriptures do not imply that God is completely unknown but that He can never be perfectly known. If God could be perfectly known by finite man, He would not be the infinite God. The finite can never comprehend the infinite. Only the infinite can perfectly know the infinite--only God can know God. This is the reason Jesus Christ said, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*" (Matt. 11:27). It has been said that it would be easier for the least particle of fine dust--that which floats in the sunbeams--to weigh the masses of matter in the whole universe than for finite man to comprehend the infinite God. Man, however, has been given the ability to think; therefore, he has been charged with the responsibility of thinking about the Creator, the only true God.

The existence of the first and supreme cause, Who is the Creator and Governor of the universe, is an obvious truth which forces itself upon every reasonably thinking person. God may be considered as the *first great cause*. There are some who foolishly ask, "Who made God?" Such a question contradicts itself. It is evident that no cause could make the *first* cause. That would make the first cause become the second cause, which is a mathematical impossibility. There must be an Alpha and Omega in our reasoning. Deity must be the starting point as well as the termination in all intelligent thinking. Anything less is irrational, and no person can rationally answer an irrational person.

Man can know the existence of God without comprehending His nature and attributes. Every existence has some foundation for its entity. The foundation of God's existence is known only to Himself; it is above the comprehension of all created beings. When one seeks to pry into such subjects as God's eternality and the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, his weak faculties are dazzled and confounded. God's perfections are infinite, and he who seeks to fathom the infinite is like the man who sits beside the Mississippi River waiting for it to run dry so he can see what the riverbed looks like. In the light of Romans 1:19-20, a natural knowledge of God is given man through the medium of created reality. This general revelation of God renders every man inexcusable. The limits of this knowledge, however, must be kept clearly in mind. Man knows that God possesses certain perfections, but he does not know how He possesses them.

The incomprehensibility of God is a relative term and speaks of a relation between the creating God and a created understanding. God knows Himself, but He is incomprehensible to His creatures. The nature of God, His excellency, perfection, works, and ways are above the thoughts and apprehensions of men. The power of God is a perfection that cannot be disputed. How can finite men form any perfect opinion of infinite power,

the power that makes such a variety of beings out of nothing? The eternity of God staggers the imagination of men. We cannot comprehend how one single act of constancy can extend to all periods of time without succession. Past and future, in respect to God, are terms we are forced to use because of the defects of our finite capacity. The omnipresence of God, too, is astounding to men. God fills all places; He is circumscribed to no place; yet, He is intimately present in every place. God not only foreknows but He has a determinate knowledge of all things, because God is present to all time and to all events which happen in time.

It is a paradox to say that God is the most known, yet the most unknown, Being in the whole universe. General revelation is sufficient to accomplish the end intended, to render every man inexcusable before the one true God (Rom. 1:19,20). God's revelation in nature, however, does not awaken depraved man to repentance and faith--repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in the Creator-God is foundational to faith in the Redeemer-Christ (Heb. 11:6), but it is not the fruit of special revelation or regeneration. Persons who feel closer to God in nature than they do in church or the study of Scripture know only the God of *general revelation*.

Philosophy, originating in depraved minds, can never construct a true system of theology. Thus, Paul warned the Colossians, saying, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of man, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). Philosophy, which is the love of wisdom, cannot be discarded without positive injury to mankind. One must bear in mind, however, that philosophy is not in itself wisdom's judge; it is only the useful servant of wisdom. Philosophy requires three factors for its true development: a first Cause, a personal knowledge of the first cause, and a knowledge of man himself. One can never have the right concept of man without, first of all, a Biblical knowledge of God. No human, however, can grasp these factors apart from special revelation; therefore, Christ said, "...no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*" (Matt. 11:27). A philosophy that omits either the Father or the Son is like a planetary system without a sun or a state of affairs without an attraction. Philosophy has found out many truths, but not the great foundational truths of the Being and attributes of God. Special revelation is required to give such knowledge.

Paul was greatly disturbed when he saw the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry (Acts 17:22-31). The apostle saw the perversion of great genius. Empty theories occupied the attention of the Athenians. The best of their gods were but men. Paul acknowledged that the destiny of the soul depended upon its worship, but unless the object of worship is the true and living God it shall continually sink lower and lower. Only one Being has a claim to the worship of man--the God who creates, governs, and redeems. There is nothing in the philosophy of men, even in its highest forms, to delight a soul that has been enlightened by the Spirit of God. Paul had the capacity to understand the philosophies of men; but, like all Christians, he was occupied with things of far greater value.

I. The works, being, and attributes of God are incomprehensible. The

further we investigate these facts the deeper and more wonderful they become.

- A. The works of God are incomprehensible.
1. The astronomer finds this to be true. His wonder increases as he passes the known sun, moon, and stars. He looks beyond the things that are seen and known into the illimitable space and feels that he has not passed the porch of the temple of creation. As his horizon increases, his wonder and amazement at creation enlarges.
  2. The theologian finds that there is nothing in the whole circle of doctrine which does not surpass the capacity of man. The extent of the horizon may vary between man and man, but even to the man with the greatest knowledge of God there is an infinite horizon beyond. There are many questions created with each answered question. Instead of being discouraged, the Christian is enabled to give forth greater praise to the infinite God. David said, "Many, O Lord my God, *are* thy wonderful works *which* thou hast done, and thy thoughts *which are* to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: *if* I would declare and speak *of them*, they are more than can be numbered" (Ps. 40:5). "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! *If* I should count them, they are more in number than the sand..." (Ps. 139:17,18).
  3. Among the works of God, redemption holds the spotlight. Everything in creation points to the redemptive purpose of God in Christ Jesus. The consummation of God's glory is seen in His redemptive work. It is vividly described in Revelation. "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10).
- B. The being of God is incomprehensible.
1. Man cannot fathom infinite perfection with the measuring stick of his own reason. He can never stretch his thoughts until they are equal to the Divine immensity.
  2. Man's inability to understand God excels his incapability of understanding his own nature. Since finite man is a mystery to himself, how much more is the infinite God a mystery to him.
  3. There is only One God, by nature. This nature is common to the Trinity, but it is not communicated from one Person of the Trinity to another. Each member of the Trinity is a partaker of it as one individual nature. One part of the nature is not enjoyed by one Person and a part by another, but the whole is enjoyed by each. For example, all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9). The doctrine of the Trinity is above but not contrary to reason. The sense in which God is three is not that in which He is one. There is no contradiction in three being one, unless it is said that the three are one in the same respect. Remember one truth: If the doctrine of the Trinity is false, Jesus Christ was nothing more than a man; and a mere man cannot be the Saviour of men.

- C. The attributes of God are incomprehensible.
1. The essential properties of an infinitely perfect Being are unfathomable.
  2. The attributes of God are divided between *negative* and *positive*. The negative attributes, such as infinity, immutability, and immortality, set God apart from whatever is imperfect in His creatures. These attributes deny that He is finite, mutable, and mortal. The positive attributes, such as wisdom, justice, holiness, mercy, etc., assert the perfections in God.
  3. Some attributes are *absolute* and others *relative*. Absolute attributes eternally agree with the essence of God, without respect to His creatures. Relative attributes agree with God in time and are expressed by Him as Creator, Governor, Preserver, and Redeemer.
  4. Some attributes are *incommunicable* and others are *communicable*. The incommunicable attributes cannot appear in creatures. They are perfections of independence, immutability, and eternity. The communicable attributes, such as holiness, justice, and wisdom, have some resemblance in men. Even these, however, are incommunicable as they are in God. None but God is essentially, originally perfect.

II. By grace, men can know the unknowable.

- A. The love of Christ passes knowledge. "...to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19).
1. We can know by grace what we cannot know by nature.
  2. We can know by faith what we cannot know by reason.
  3. We can know the effects without comprehending the cause.
  4. We can know the reality of love without understanding its nature.
  5. We can know that increasingly which cannot be known perfectly.
- B. The riches of Christ are unsearchable. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8).
1. The riches of Christ's Person are known only in part. The hypostatical union of two natures--Divine and human--in one Person is a great mystery (I Tim. 3:16).
  2. The work of redemption applied to the sinner is a mystery (Col. 1:27). Human monarchs weaken their government by saving rebels, but God strengthens the force of His moral administration by redeeming transgressors. Human monarchs, by delivering rebels, endanger the rights of loyal citizens; God, in the restoration of rebels, promotes the rights of all. Human monarchs have shown their justice in crushing rebels, but God shows His justice in saving them.

GOD IS ETERNAL  
(Ps. 90:1,2)

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God.

According to our text, God was before the creation of the world. His Divine existence reaches out of the unlimited past--"...even *from* everlasting...." It extends into the unlimited future--"...*to* everlasting...." The great truth of God's eternality is revealed in the words, "...thou *art* God." One might say of a creature that he was, he is, or he shall be. He is not the same that he was and will not be the same that he now is. God, however, is the same now that He was; He shall be the same that He now is (Heb. 13:8). The correct way to speak of God is, *He is*--"Thou *art*, O God." Eternity is noncommunicable and proper only to God. "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (I Tim. 6:16). Whatsoever is not God is temporary, and whatsoever is eternal is God.

The eternality of God signifies that He is without beginning or ending; He is without succession or change. Eternity is opposed to the expanse of time; time is made up of past, present, and future. Someone has said that eternity is duration without beginning or ending, existence without bounds or dimension, present without past or future, infancy without youth or old age, life without birth or death, and today without yesterday or tomorrow. Duration, however, is not a good word because it signifies the length of time during which something continues to exist. Constancy is the better word. It means continuing without pause, permanent, perpetual, ceaseless, uninterrupted. Eternity, therefore, is not duration; it is constancy. Time is transitory presence; eternity is abiding presence.

I recently talked with a man who said that as a boy he wondered why God waited so long before He made the world. After studying the meaning of eternity, one must admit that God did not wait a long time to create. I have previously stated that man cannot comprehend how one single act of constancy can extend to all periods of time without succession. Past and future, with respect to God, are terms that the defects of our finite capacity force us to use. Many religionists fail to realize that eternal does not mean only *pre-temporal*; consequently, they make great mistakes. Eternal also signifies *co-temporal* and *post-temporal*. The creation, from God's point of view, is in the *now*. Thus, that which is past to us is present to God; furthermore, that which is future to us is a present fact to God. All things have, with respect to God, a *known* and a *real* existence; both, however, are at the same time, since there is no time with God. Though all future things, from man's point of view, do not coexist with God; He coexists with them. "...I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I *am* he" (Is. 41:4). Divine constancy must be considered as the ever present *now*, not any more capable of division into parts than the Divine existence itself.

Eternity is a perfection by which God is described in Scripture.

The eternal God *is thy* refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms...(Deut. 33:27).

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy... (Is. 57:15).

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen (I Tim. 1:17).

The true understanding of Divine eternity does not consist in making things past to be still present or things future to be already present. God's eternality is such a perfect, independent, and unchangeable comprehension that the Divine constancy embraces all things at once. The same principle of eternality may be applied to omnipresence. God is not only present everywhere but He fills all places eternally. There are four words in I Timothy 1:17 that will help us to better comprehend God's greatness. They are *eternal, immortal, invisible, and only*. *Eternal*, in this verse, means *King of the ages*, proving that He ever is. *Immortal* denotes that He shall ever be because He is the living God. *Invisible* applies to His nature that ever remains unseen, except through the mediacy of the Divine Son. *Only* indicates that God abides incomparable. There is none like Him; He alone is God. The attribute of eternity distinguishes the one true God from all false gods. Thus, it offers a sure ground of trust for believers but strikes a note of terror to all unbelievers.

There are only three kinds of beings. First, there is the Entity Who is without beginning or ending, proper only to the eternal God. God alone was before time, and there is no searching into the records of eternity. All creatures derive their existence from the eternal Being. That which is can have nothing before it to be a cause of its subsistence. A change in the eternal Essence is as impossible as cessation; therefore, the eternal Being is immutable. Second, there are those beings that had a beginning but shall have no ending. Both angels and men have a never ceasing existence. Death is not cessation of existence; it is separation of existence. Third, there are creatures that have a beginning and ending. Beasts, fowls, and fishes all have an ending; thus, their existence ends with their lives. The second and third orders are dependent upon the first and eternal Being. God, the eternal Entity, is the creator and sustainer of all. The life of creatures is successive, but God is constant. God not only remains but is constant. "But thou *art* the same, and thy years shall have no end" (Ps. 102:27).

The essence of God is eternally the same, "...thou *art* the same...." Both the *nature* and *perfections* of God are immutable as well as eternal. To remain the same argues immutability and eternality. That which remains the same is not changed, and what is changed cannot remain the same. Immutability is ascribed to God; therefore, it can never be attributed to any other. Stephen Charnock said, "God is his own eternity. He is not eternal by grant...,but by nature and essence.... If eternity were anything distinct from God, and not the essence of God, then there would be something which was not God necessary to perfect God. ...Every perfection would be imperfect if it were not always a perfection."

I. The eternal God is the great *I Am*.

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you (Ex. 3:14).

A. God's proper name is I AM.

1. The present tense of this description manifests that God's essence knows no past or future. Thus, God is distinguished from all creatures. No created being could say in truth, *I am*.
2. The title I AM speaks of the constancy of Divine reality. God could not speak of Himself as *I was*; that would indicate that He is not now what He once was. Neither could He say, *I will be*; that would intimate that He is not now what He shall be. I AM signifies both His eternality and immutability.
3. I AM expresses self-existence. If God came from another, He from whom He received His being would be greater than Himself. This would make the first cause the second cause, which would be mathematically impossible. If God gave existence to Himself, then there was a time when He was nothing. How can nothing give existence to itself? It is impossible for any being to give existence to itself. There must be an entity to act; therefore, something must first exist before it acts. I AM is eternal existence. God is the independent among dependent beings and the unchangeable amidst a changing universe.
4. Eternity is sometimes fragmentarily expressed for the benefit of man's finite capacity. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). It cannot be said of any created being that he always is what he was, and shall always be what he is. The eternal I AM, however, is what He was and shall be what He is. Such expression is only for creatures of time. The distinction between the Creator and creatures is that God *is*, and everything else in the world *becomes*. Human beings are continually becoming different, mentally and physically, from birth to death. God never changes or becomes anything different from what He is now.

B. God's eternality and immutability are inseparable perfections.

1. If God changed or was not eternal, He could not be immutable in His nature (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). Each perfection compliments and protects the other. God's attributes are eternal (Rom. 1:20).
2. If God were not eternal, He could not be perfect. A finite duration is inconsistent with infinite perfection. Eternity and time differ just as infinity and finite differ. To have a beginning is an imperfection. Man, a creature of time, is said to be of yesterday (Job 8:9). If God were not eternal, His beginning would have to be as yesterday; this could never be said of Divine perfection.
3. If God were not eternal, He could not be constant in His purpose (Eph. 3:11). God's decree accompanies and follows as well as precedes its fulfillment. His purpose, therefore, cannot be regarded as a lifeless foreordination. Deistic ideas can arise only out of an ill-balanced and unhealthy over-concentration on the one aspect of man's view of eternity--the

past. The eternal decree is as much alive and relevant today and tomorrow as it was yesterday.

4. If God is not eternal, then there is no everlasting covenant of grace (Heb. 13:20,21). This covenant is unilateral (one sided). The eternal God alone makes and maintains the covenant. God is called the *Ancient of days* (Dan. 7:13), not the *Ancient in days*. If God's constancy could be measured by days (II Pet. 3:8), He would not be immense, immutable, and perfect.

## II. The eternal God is a comfort to the saved.

The eternal God *is thy* refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy *them* (Deut. 33:27).

- A. The eternal God is the Christian's refuge and support.
  1. Men are in need of a refuge. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, is the refuge for those eternally chosen (Eph. 1:4). Our sins are eternally expiated by the eternal Son of God, who became the Son of Man (I Pet. 1:18-21).
  2. The everlasting arms suggest more than protection from storms and troubles without; they suggest the strong arms of the everlasting love of a Father's heart.
- B. The eternal God rewards the godly.
  1. God has appointed eternal recompense for the saints (II Cor. 4:17; I Thess. 4:17; Ps. 16:11).
  2. The reward of the saved will increase throughout eternity (Eph. 2:7). As there is an eternity, so it will take eternity to exhaust the riches of God's grace.

## III. The eternal God is a terror to the unsaved.

*It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31).

- A. To live under the punishment of the eternal God is dreadful.

"...the Lord *is* the true God, he *is* the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation" (Jer. 10:10).

  1. Sin is aggravated by God's eternity (Rom. 1:23).
  2. Unsaved people erect resemblances of God contrary to His immortal nature. God cannot be deprived of His glory; but depraved men, in their estimation, deprive Him of His glory. Thus, they show their contempt for God's eternity by changing the glory of the incorruptible God into images of the creatures of time.
- B. The eternal God will eternally punish the wicked. "...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess. 1:7,8).
  1. Punishment is without cessation. "For Tophet *is* ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made *it* deep



*and* large: the pile thereof *is* fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it" (Is. 30:33). The wrath of God is compared to a continually running stream.

2. Wrath is without the mixture of mercy. "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10).
3. Judgment is without hope. They shall seek death but shall not find it--always dying but never dead (Rev. 9:6). The word eternal removes all thought of hope. If punishment could be for a million years, there would be hope; but in hell there is no hope.

## THERE IS BUT ONE GOD

But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him (I Cor. 8:6).

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God *is* one Lord (Deut. 6:4).

The unity of God can be understood by reason, but the triunity of God is apprehended only by revelation. Unity, however, is not easy to define. In mathematics, unity denotes the number one or a quantity regarded as one; whereas, in literature, it signifies harmony among the parts or elements of a work producing a single effect. The unity of God means that there is one God; this unity stands in opposition to the claim that there are many gods. Both Moses and Paul, from the texts of Scripture we are using in this message, are talking about the unity of the Divine essence. Since there is only one God, the essence of God is one and cannot be divided. We must state that there is a God unless there is none, and there is no God unless there is one. Moreover, we must conclude that the nature of God is one; therefore, He is a unity in Himself. The *nature* of God is denotive that His essence is that by which He is what He is--*I am that I am*.

Paul, in I Corinthians 8:6, sharply contrasts idolators and Christians. Idolators have many gods; but since Christians have only one God, they are monotheists. The one true God is entitled *Father* in this text, not in relation to any Person of the Godhead but to His creatures. The expression "...to us *there is but* one God..." does not exclude the Son from being God. If, by the omission of His name, Jesus Christ is eliminated as one God with the Father, then the Father is ejected as one Lord with Jesus Christ because His name is omitted in the next part of the verse--"...and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him."

Jesus Christ is not the Son of God by mediation; He is the Son of God by *nature*. Christ's mediation did not make Him the Father's Son. The Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God before His incarnation; therefore, He is the eternal Son. Both Father and Son coeternally exist. Though there are more Persons than one in the Godhead, there is only one essence. The Divine *nature* of Jesus Christ is not begotten because the Divine essence neither begets nor is begotten; the Divine *Person* within that essence is begotten. More than one Person exists in the Divine essence, but there is only one essence. Since there is nothing that is not eternal in the Divine nature, then Jesus Christ is the eternal Son. This is no more of a mystery than a Trinity in unity, or a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. As man is a mysterious combination of body, soul, and spirit in one person, so the one God is a mysterious combination of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are no perfect finite analogies.

Paul distinguishes Christian monotheism from the heathen concept of many gods. The title *Father* is ascribed to the one God, and the name *Lord* indicates the Deity of Jesus Christ. Relationship between the Father and Son was not the burden of Paul's message at that time. He was emphasizing the one true God, and he included the Lord Jesus in the one God. The apostle

stressed that all things originated with the Father and came through the Son as the Agent of creation. As this was true in the creation of the heavens and earth, so it is a fact in the new creation in Christ (II Cor. 4:6; 5:17).

The apostle Paul differentiates many gods from the one true God--the God of creation, providence, and redemption. In every age and in every nation depraved men have sought to make gods for themselves. Some have carved gods from stone, silver, gold and wood; others fashion gods from their own distorted minds. Today the gods of money, business, pleasure, lust, and luxury are prevalent. As many assume the name of God, so many adopt the name of Christ. Men have sought to multiply gods, and today men are multiplying christs. A christ that is the representative of humanity is the spirit that characterizes this apostate age. Everyone desires his own christ, just as each heathen carved his own god. Men invent all kinds of christs. Some covet a christ who is not God; they would have him to be a great social figure. Others are desirous of a christ without a sacrifice; they do not acknowledge any need of salvation from sin. Still others want a christ who is nothing more than a great hero--superchrist. All of these concepts of Christ are heretical. (Study II Cor. 11:4)

There is nothing in the context of I Corinthians 8:6 that would lead us to suppose that *Lord* is less Divine than *God*. The oneness of Deity is emphasized not only here but throughout Scripture. Christ said, "I and *my* Father are one" (John 10:30). The word *one* is in the neuter, referring to one substance. The masculine gender would have referred to one person. The Son and the Father were not only one in purpose but one in nature and power. There is one Person of the Father, another Person of the Son, and another Person of the Spirit. The context proves that Jesus Christ was ascribing the safety of the sheep not only to the purpose and power of the Father but also to Himself. He added, "I and *my* Father one we are," to prove that He is equal to the Father in purpose and power to protect the sheep. The Corinthians were not only *through* Christ as creatures but *through* Him in a *special relationship*. Through Christ, believers are separated from all things unto God. Thus, believers are *unto God* in a special sense; they are presented to God as the fruit of Divine grace. God was the Father of the Corinthians in a redemptive sense.

Both Moses and Paul stressed the unity of God (Deut. 6:4). The name of Jehovah is always in the singular because it signifies essence. Moses said, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God *is* one Lord." This was the great confession of Israel. The word Lord, rendered Persons, is a plural noun, to which the plural *our* is added. Hear, O Israel, Jehovah, our Divine Persons, is one Jehovah. This is the doctrine of the Old Testament; namely that the three Divine Persons are one God. To say that these three Persons are one Person is contradictory, but to say they all subsist in the one essence is not incongruous. Consider, once again, what Jesus Christ said in John 10:30: "I and *my* Father are one." If Christ and the Father are the same Person, Christ would have declared *I and myself are one*. If the distinction between the Persons of the Godhead is not personal, then, according to John 14:16, Christ would have stated "I will pray myself, and I myself will give you myself, that He who is not another, but is myself, may abide with you forever." The Biblical doctrine of the Trinity implies that God is one; therefore, the Trinity of the Christian faith means a distinction of Persons within one indivisible Divine nature.

I. The unity of God is not to be understood in the following ways.

- A. The unity of God is not to be understood in the sense of subordinationism.
1. Arius (256-336) was a presbyter of the church of Alexandria.
  2. Arius taught that there is one supreme God and two subordinate ones. A doctrine that reduces Christ to anything less than the Most High is *subordinationism*.
  3. Athanasius exposed Arius by saying, "To say that a father begets a child is one thing, but to say the Father begat the Son is another. The one is temporal, the other eternal."
- B. The unity of God is not to be understood in the sense of modalism.
1. Sabellius (first half of the third century) taught that God is but one person.
  2. The *modalistic* view of Sabellius states that there are not three Persons in the Godhead, but one who manifests himself in three different modes. To Sabellianism, the Godhead is one individual monad--an indestructible unit. Father, Son, and Spirit only express three different operations of God, or the modes of Divine activity. This theory is expressed in the following manner: As creator and lawgiver, God is Father; as redeemer, God is Son; as inspirer and bestower of grace, God is Spirit. Much contemporary theology and preaching are modalistic through fear of tritheism.
  3. The incarnation of Christ is the key to the truth of the Trinity and the answer to all errors against the Trinity. The incarnation demands a distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit. John Bunyan gave a good answer to modalism when he said, "If in the Godhead there be but one, not three, then which of the three is God? If only one be God, then the other two are nothing. If the three be but three different manifestations of the Godhead, then one manifestation sent another manifestation--one notion sent another notion--one distinction sent another distinction. Of this error these are the consequences, we are only to believe in notions and distinctions, when we believe in the Father and the Son; and so shall have no other heaven and glory than notions and distinctions can furnish."
- C. The unity of God is not to be understood in the sense of tritheism.
1. Tritheism was never a threat to the early church, but modalism and subordinationism were threats to the local aspect of the church.
  2. Tritheism transfers the enumeration from persons to the substance, thus making three essences.
  3. To say that God is one and there are three Persons in the Godhead is not contradictory. A term may signify one in one sense and three in another sense. For instance, the sun is one body, but this one body manifests light, heat, and time. Again, man is one person, but in this one person there are soul, spirit, and body.

II. The unity of God is to be understood in the following manner.

- A. There is a trinity of Persons in one God.

1. It has been said that in reference to God we may not discuss mere and simple unity, nor mere and simple trinality; but we must discuss unity in trinality, and trinality in unity.
  2. God is not one *and* three, but one *in* three. The one essence is simultaneously three Persons, and the three Persons are one essence. The Trinity is not a composition of one essence and three persons, neither is it an essence without distinctions united with three distinctions. The instant we think of trinity, we think of unity. There cannot be two eternal beings or two self-existent gods.
- B. The unity of God has no equal.
1. It is the only unity of its kind. God is not merely one, but the only One. He is not one, like man, of a species. God is one God; He is the only God.
  2. God is a unity. He is not a unit, like a marble, which is marked by singleness. Mere singleness is incompatible with society. Sabellianism, which denies a distinction of Persons in the Godhead, believes God is a unit. Those who deny the eternity of Jesus Christ are guilty of the same heresy. There is in the Godhead the *I, Thou*, or the subject-object relationship, each to the others. A subject without an object could not experience love. Love is a social attribute, therefore the Godhead includes more than a single Person. Personality does not exist in isolation but in association with other persons of equal nature.

### III. The one God condescended to reveal Himself.

- A. Such condescension transcends the reason of man.
1. How can man, without arrogant presumption, cherish the thought that he might find acceptance with God? God's greatness and man's insignificance, God's holiness and man's impurity seem to destroy every hope of acceptance.
  2. How can God condescend to take notice of sinful man? How can such condescension ever harmonize with infinite purity, justice, and dignity?
- B. God's condescension is answered only in His unmerited favor.
1. While there is only one God, there are in the one essence of God three distinct Persons.
  2. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each fulfills a separate department in the economy of human redemption.
  3. Planning, providing, and applying of redemption are all of grace. The reason lies only with God.

GOD IS A TRINITY  
(Matt. 28:16-20)

The doctrine of the Trinity, like all the great mysteries of God, must be understood within the context of God's gift of faith in regeneration. Jesus Christ commanded His disciples, in the great commission, to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The whole revelation of salvation is comprised in these three names. The circuit of revelation terminates in the Divine Three. What the Father purposed, the Son effected, and the Holy Spirit appropriates. Salvation depends on this threefold act of God. What the Son of God has done for us on the cross and what the Holy Spirit effects within us is all the act of the same God, Who from eternity purposed our salvation. That which was purposed before the foundation of the world was fulfilled in time. The accomplishment, however, is declared under this threefold revelation: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God is a Trinity, and the mystery of His Triune nature is historically revealed. The work of salvation would not have been accomplished in a triune manner if He were not a Trinity in nature. The steps in the revelation of God, from Father to Son to Holy Spirit, must be experienced in reverse by men. Regenerated men proceed from the Spirit to the Son to the Father. The Holy Spirit enables the regenerated person to embrace Christ in conversion, and the Son reveals the Father to the recipients of grace (Ps. 36:9; II Cor. 4:6; Matt. 11:27; John 3:8-16).

We speak of three Persons in the Godhead. Godhead is just another way of saying God. Warfield said, "As manhood is that which makes a man a man, and childhood is that which makes a child a child, so Godhead is that which makes God, God." There is only one Godhead, but the one God is manifested in three Persons. The nature of the one God is not divided into three parts, with each Person possessing one third of the Godhead. The fulness of the Godhead is enjoyed by each Person. The sense in which God is one is not the same in which He is three. God is one in the sense of unity of essence (intrinsic nature); He is three in the sense of the Trinity of Persons. There is no contradiction in three being one, unless one claims that the three are one in the same sense. The Father is Father of the Son; the Son is Son of the Father; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in *essence*; in this manner they are one. They are three in their distinct *subsistences* (state of existing); in this manner they are said to be three.

The commission of Matthew 28:19-20 was a confirmation of the Trinity. Believers, in their obedience to baptism, were identified with *the name* of Jehovah. *In the name* is singular; there is one essence. The name of God was--to the Jews--Jehovah, and to regard the believing Jews under that name was to identify them with the one true God. Plurality of the name would have indicated three Beings--each with its own distinguishing name. The Lord Jesus commanded His followers to identify their converts with the name, and in that name there must be the threefold enumeration of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The eternal Son places Himself by the Father and the Spirit, thus, together with them, constituting the one true God. To deny the doctrine of the Trinity is to declare that Jesus Christ was no more than man. Consequently, denial of the Trinity is heresy. Refusal of the

Trinity is denial of redemption; acknowledgment of the Trinity is declaration of redemption. The central point of redemption is the confession of the Triune God.

God's nature is not one and three in the same sense. The Trinity is not contrary to reason, although, it is above reason. Reason is most reasonable when it ceases to reason about that which is above reason. Imagination is amended by sense, and sense is rectified by reason; but all are corrected by the faith which is the fruit of regeneration. There is no mental law forbidding man to believe there is an eternal trinity in the one God. According to the Bible, God is dependent on none of His creation for perfection. He is perfect within Himself; and in His perfection, all the conditions of blessedness are realized. God is love (I John 4:8, 16); this is an eternal quality of His nature. Occasion for the exercise of love, apart from His relation to finite creatures, must be within His nature. God did not begin to love when He created; this would have made His love a mere potentiality, depending on creation for its satisfaction. Love is a trinity. Augustine said, "If God is love, then there must be in Him a Lover, a Beloved, and a Spirit of love; for no love is conceivable without a Lover and a Beloved." The conception of love involves a trinity. It proceeds *from* the Lover, moves *toward* the Beloved, and unites the Lover and the Beloved through the Spirit of *union*. Love is a social attribute; therefore, the conditions and relations implied by it must exist in the very nature of God. The analogy of love, however, is defective because it does not illustrate a tripersonality. It combines only two persons and a relationship. The illustration is advantageous merely to prove the social quality of love; it does not manifest possession of a common substance by the subject and its objects.

Persons who deny the Trinity in Christ's commission to baptize are guilty of heresy. The word error is not strong enough to use in this instance. All Christians are guilty of error, but they are not heretics. Heretics are persons who willfully and deliberately reject the plain teaching of Scripture. According to those who deny the Trinity, Matthew 28:19 must read: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of an exalted man, and of a certain influence of the Father." Furthermore, they would have to read Paul's benediction to the Corinthians (II Cor. 13:14) in the following manner: "The grace of a creature (human nature), and the love of the Creator, and the communion of the creative energy be with you all. amen."

The purpose of our present study is to show that salvation is *of* the Father, *through* the Son, and *by* the Holy Spirit.

I. The purpose of salvation is access *to* the Father.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1,2).

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:18).

- A. The source of all things is meant to be the purpose of all; this is the principle of salvation (Rom. 11:36; I Cor. 8:6).
  - 1. Man came from the creating hand of God (Gen. 1:26,27; 2:7; Ps. 100:3).
  - 2. Man's return to God is not in himself but in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit (I Tim. 2:5; John 14:6; Eph. 1:7-14).
- B. Man, by his complicity with Adam in the fall (Rom. 5:12), has been alienated from the life of God the Father (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21).
  - 1. The electing love of the Father, however, is constant (Jer. 31:3; I Kings 10:9; I John 4:10).
  - 2. The Father designed the great plan of salvation for those whom He loved (Rom. 5:6-11).

## II. The method of salvation is *through* Jesus Christ.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit (I Pet. 3:18).

- A. The elect of God are estranged from God by the fall.
  - 1. By nature they are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3).
  - 2. By nature they have turned every one to his own way (Is. 53:6).
- B. God the Father sent Jesus Christ to redeem them because Christ is God (John 1:1,14; Heb. 1:8).
  - 1. The One sent to redeem must be of the same nature as the Sender. Human analogies imperfectly illustrate Divine principles. Nevertheless, would it not be reasonable to say that if a colony of rebels had been cut off from their fatherland, an ambassador of that same fatherland should be sent for them? The Ambassador Whom the Father sent was of the very nature that sent Him. Jesus Christ is God of God; He is Light of Light; He is begotten, not made; He is one substance with the Father.
  - 2. Jesus Christ came into the world not to prescribe the cure for depraved sinners but to be their remedy. After purging our sins, He sat down because the work was finished (Heb. 1:3).

## III. The power of salvation is *by* the Holy Spirit.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (II Thess. 2:13).



- A. The sinner's utter dependence on God for his deliverance cannot be overstated.
  - 1. Salvation is of God (Jonah 2:9; John 1:12,13).
  - 2. Power is a suitable figure, since the soul must be lifted out of the pit of depravity and raised to a high platform of grace (I Sam. 2:8; Eph. 2:6).
- B. When the soul comes back to God, God in the soul brings it.
  - 1. Man who came from God shall go to God in the power of God.
  - 2. The sinner goes to the Father through the Son by the Spirit. If we return to the figure of the Fatherland, God is the Divine Fatherland of the elect. Christ, Who came to redeem the elect rebels, is the Ambassador of the same Fatherland. Finally, the Holy Spirit imparts the principle of spiritual life into the elect colony of depraved souls; thus, the regenerated souls are made conscious of the blessings of their Fatherland. To state this great principle differently, there is creative Deity from Whom mankind sprang, Incarnate Deity Who purchased salvation, and infused Deity Who set the elect homeward.

GOD IS A UNITY  
(Eph. 2:18)

*Through* Christ both Jews and Gentiles have access *by* one Spirit *unto* the Father. While Scriptures refute the heresy of a plurality of gods, they establish the fact of a plurality of Persons in the Godhead. There is only one God, but the one God subsists in three Persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The word of God testifies to the essential Deity not only of the Father but also of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

To form an opinion of personality in God apart from an association of *equal* Persons in the Godhead is an impossibility. For example, the personality of man cannot be accounted for by his association with animals, unless one believes in the damnable doctrine of evolution. The evolutionist, in the vain imagination of his twisted brain, thinks his personality--the organized pattern of behavioral characteristics--has evolved over the lower characteristics of his monkey ancestors. I am sure, however, if the monkey could understand the *devolution* of man, it would resent the humanly devised theory of evolution. The monkey is better off than the evolutionist. If it could talk I am sure it would say, "It would have been better had you never been born." The reason is that man has had a beginning but he will have *no ending*; whereas, the monkey has had a beginning, and it *shall have an ending*. The monkey, therefore, is better off than the evolutionist because it does not have to worry about what takes place after death. After chasing that well-deserved rabbit, let us come back to the fact that man's personality cannot be accounted for by his contact with lower creatures. Man's personality is developed in association with fellow human beings. The personality of God exists in the Godhead; therefore, this personality *equally* exists in the three Persons of the Godhead. In view of the trinity of God it would be better to say that *God is personal* than to say God is a Person.

Divine nature must be distinguished from human nature. Human nature can exist in more than one person, but not as an indivisible whole. One man is not the identical and numerical substance of another man. Two men have the same *kind* of nature, but they do not have *identically* and *numerically* the same nature. Each man has a *fractional* part of one specific human nature. In human nature one man exists separately from another. The birth or physical death of one man does not affect that of another. Divine nature, even though it exists in more than one Person, exists wholly in the Father, wholly in the Son, and wholly in the Holy Spirit. There is no division of Divine nature; it exists wholly in each Person of the Godhead, simultaneously and eternally. The distinction of Persons in the Godhead does not divide the eternal essence of God. One cannot say "Jesus is part of God," although many so-called evangelicals are erroneously making that statement. I recently heard a "Doctor of Divinity," while exposing the *Jesus of Superstar*, say, in speaking of his own *Jesus*, "My Jesus is part of *that* [referring to the God of the Bible] God." Here is an illustration of a person exposing the heresy of one cult while manifesting the error of his own. In the Godhead one Person cannot exist without the other Persons. Christ said, "...The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19). The statement *can do nothing* does not indicate that Jesus Christ was a weakling, incapable of action but that He could not be *isolated* from the Father. His perfection or equality, rather than

inferiority, is taught in this verse. The Son did only that which pleased the Father. He spoke the Father's *word*, did the Father's *work*, and fulfilled the Father's *will*. As there can be no nature or personality without a person, future or past without a present, there can be no God the Father or God the Holy Spirit without God the Son.

The trinality of God is not to be described by either attributes or modes of action. There are distinctions in the three Persons of the Godhead. Each has a Divine personality. Each is capable of hearing, speaking, and loving; but all have an uncreated Divine nature, eternally antecedent to all created creatures and things. Each Person possesses infinite knowledge, will, and power; but all three are inseparably united. Therefore, the knowledge, will, and power are ever in perfect harmony. As the Lord Jesus Christ always pleases the Father, the Spirit pleases both the Father and the Son. The Father is the Person Who sent the Son; the Son is the Person Who came from the Father; and the Holy Spirit is the Person Who has been sent by the Father and the Son. Thus, there are incommunicable operations which are not performed by the three Persons jointly. There is a subordination in the Godhead in regard to the mode of operation, but this subordination does not imply inferiority.

Eternal life is knowing *the only true God* (John 17:3). Some say that the Son was addressing the Father; therefore, *the only true God* applies to the Father and not to the Son. Furthermore, they suggest that the Son would not admit His equality with God; hence, the subordination is not simply to operation but to nature. Such human reasoning is obnoxious. As life is the perfection of being, eternal life is the perfection of life. The fountainhead of eternal life is God because He is the living God. The equality of the Father *and* the Son is set forth in John 17:3, in the matter of eternal life. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." This mode of expression is due to the position of Christ as Mediator. He does not call Himself God; He refers to Himself as the one sent by God. The one true God is a Trinity, *and* Jesus Christ--the Mediator--is the manifestation of the Godhead. Paul said, "For in him / Christ--v. 8 / dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). When the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit is designated, the word *God* is used in the sense of Deity--not Trinity. Read John 1:1 and insert the word Trinity for the word God and see how ridiculous it is. God is one, and the one God is manifested in three Persons. As speech reveals mind, the Word--Jesus Christ--reveals God (John 1:18). In order to reveal God, the Word Himself must be Divine (John 1:18).

The name *God* sometimes denotes Trinity. Christ said, in His instruction to the Samaritan woman, "God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Reference to God in this text does not refer to any particular Person of the Godhead but to the Divine Trinity. Worship is ascribed to God, not to one Person of the Godhead. The word *God* is used for Trinity in the Doxology where it reads, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." The next line explains who God is--"Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." If one of the Persons of the Godhead is a Father, He is Father eternally. The same principle applies to the other trinitarian Persons. As the Father is never other than a Father, the other Persons are never other than Son and Spirit.

- I. There are three eternal distinctions in the eternal essence of God.
- A. The distinctions are not three different ways in which God manifests Himself.
    1. The terms Father, Son, and Spirit do not express different relations of God to His creatures.
    2. They are not analogous to the terms Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor.
  - B. The one Divine Being subsists in three Persons.
    1. The one true God subsists in three Divine Persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
    2. Some things attributed to all three Persons are eternality, omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. On the other hand, certain acts are predicated of one Person which are never predicational of the other two Persons. For instance, the Son is sent by the Father, but the Father is never sent by the Son. The Spirit is sent by both the Father and the Son, but the Spirit never sends either the Father or the Son. Each Person has a distinguishing quality of His own.
  - C. The distinctions of Persons is eternal.
    1. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternal (Deut. 33:27; Rom. 16:26; Rev. 1:17; Heb. 13:8; 9:14).
    2. Eternal distinctions are absolutely necessary because neither Person is God without the others. Each, with the other two, is God.
- II. The three eternal Persons in the eternal Godhead are inseparable in their work.
- A. The Persons of the Godhead are inseparable in *creation*.
    1. All things are of the Father (I Cor. 8:6).
    2. All things were made by Him (the Word) (John 1:3).
    3. The Spirit of the Lord has made man (Job 33:4).
  - B. The Persons of the Godhead are inseparable in the *incarnation*.
    1. The Father prepared the Son a body (Heb. 10:5). Unto the Father the words were spoken: "...I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). The coming of Christ, the eternal Son, into the world was the effect of the mutual counsel of the Father and the Son. Christ's submission to the Father's will was an act of eternity as well as time.
    2. The Son of God was born of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35). The human nature of Christ is called *that holy thing* because human nature is not a person. If the human nature were a person, there were two persons in Christ. Since the human nature cannot exist of itself, it was taken at once into union with the Person of the Son of God. Thus, there was the union of two natures--Divine and human--in one Person. Some heretics claim that in order for the human nature of Christ to be completely human, it would have to partake of both man and woman. The answer to this is found in the example of Adam and Eve.
    3. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary (Luke 1:35). Conception by the Holy Spirit kept the human nature from original sin.

- The Son of God experienced a birth holiness that man shall not experience until the glorification of his body.
- C. The Persons of the Godhead are inseparable in Christ's *death*.
    1. The Father gave His Son (John 3:16; Is. 53:10).
    2. The Son laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:18).
    3. The Son offered Himself through the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14).
  - D. The Persons of the Godhead are inseparable in Christ's *resurrection*.
    1. Christ's resurrection is ascribed to God the Father (Acts. 2:24, 32; 3:26).
    2. Christ's resurrection is ascribed to Himself (John 2:19).
    3. Christ's resurrection is ascribed to the Spirit (I Pet. 3:18).
  - E. The Persons of the Godhead are inseparable in the salvation of the elect.
    1. The Father elected a certain number to be saved (Eph. 1:3-6).
    2. The Son purchased the redemption of that certain number of elect ones (Eph. 1:7-12).
    3. The Holy Spirit regenerates those whom the Father chose and the Son redeemed (John 3:8; I Pet. 1:2).

III. The three Persons in the Godhead are necessary in the *worship* and *work* of Christians.

- A. Christians embrace the three Persons in the one God in their *worship*.
  1. Believers have access *to* the Father (Eph. 2:18; Matt. 6:9).
  2. Believers have access *to* the Father *through* Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:18; John 14:6, 13, 14).
  3. Believers have access *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *by* the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18; Rom. 8:26, 27; Jude 20,21).
- B. Christians embrace the three Persons in the one God in their *work* (I Cor. 2:2).
  1. They declare the testimony of the Father.
  2. They are determined to know nothing save Christ and Him crucified.
  3. They demonstrate this by the power of the indwelling Spirit.

## SUBSTANCE AND PERSONS DIFFER

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.  
And there are differences of administrations, but the  
same Lord. And there are diversities of operations,  
but it is the same God which worketh all in all  
(I Cor. 12:4-6).

The controversy that exists over the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be laid at the feet of Scripture, but it must be attributed to human reason. When reason disagrees with revelation it must be rejected, because apart from Scripture reason has no infallible standard. The use of human language is not wrong because this is the only manner by which God speaks to man. Though the nature of God and the nature of man are different, it cannot be denied that God made man in the image and likeness of the one God in unity (Gen. 1:26; 2:7). It has been said that in creating man God theomorphized; therefore, man necessarily anthropomorphizes. This means that God condescended to man in order that man might ascend to God. Divine truth must be expressed in human terms so that man might understand. The responsibility of an interpreter is to trace out anthropomorphic expressions, as far as possible, to see the underlying spiritual truth. Interpretation must be guarded so that one does not make the majestic God nothing more than the likeness of man. William Gurnall said, "It is natural for every man to desire to accommodate his lusts with such conception of God as may be most favourable to and suit best with them. God charges some for this: 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself!' Sinners do with God as the Ethiopians do with angels, whom they picture with black faces that they may be like themselves." Stephen Charnock said, "Man, with a giant-like pride, would climb into the throne of the Almighty, and establish a contradiction to the will of God by making his own will, and not God's, the square and rule of his actions. This principle commenced and took date in Paradise, when Adam would not depend upon the will of God revealed to him, but upon himself and his own will, and thereby makes himself as God."

God is one in three Persons and no less so because He is immaterial and infinite. There is always a danger, in the human conception of God, that man will be satisfied with performances of God and fail to behold the features of the Triune God. Capability to discern the works or attributes of God is not sufficient; one must be able to know the one God in three Persons-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man must understand that knowledge of God differs from all other sciences. It can never be said that science investigates nature, man, and God; therefore, the science that investigates God is theology. The person who views these three as coordinates logically begins from the denial of God as God. Theology is taught by God, teaches of God, and leads to God. Therefore it cannot be coordinated with other sciences that are investigated by man's understanding. Theology is robbed of its unique character when it is coordinated with other sciences. Theology does not deal with created things but with the Creator of created things. Knowledge of God is of a different nature and comes in another way than the knowledge of finite things. Comprehension of the infinite God comes by the illumination of the infinite Spirit (I Cor. 2:6-16).

Every argument against the doctrine of the Trinity may be summarized to mean that it does not conform to the limitations of the human mind.

For instance, the Unitarian says that he cannot accept what his reason disapproves. The answer to his argument is that there are many things approved by all men which are above their ability to perceive. No honest person will confine his actions to such restricted limitations of his natural reason. To comprehend a proposition is one thing, but to apprehend the fact asserted is another. These two aspects of understanding are constantly distinguished in human experience. No person can explain the way mind acts upon matter; he has not discovered the mysteries which are related to life itself. He does not understand how immaterial and material elements combine to form one individual. Each of these elements is necessary for man's existence in this world. If plurality and unity are required for human existence on earth, why should plurality and unity be denied in the Divine existence? It has been suggested that God would not include in His creature--man--what He cannot manifest in Himself. Did not God create man in His own likeness? This analogy, however, must never be used any further than to establish a principle. In the instance of man, there is one consciousness with a twofold subsistence; whereas, in the case of the Godhead, there are three consciousnesses united in one nature. The Persons of the Godhead are not separate but they are distinct. The Trinity, therefore, is composed of three united Persons without separate existence; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are so completely united as to form one God. It is not required that one God shall be restricted to one Person.

The doctrine of the Trinity is so far-reaching in its implications that persons who fail to see its importance embrace some heresy regarding the fundamentals of the faith once delivered to the saints. Denial of the Trinity dishonors the Scriptures and the doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, redemption, and regeneration. Scripture presents one God subsisting in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity does not assert that one God is three Gods, neither that three Gods are one God. God is not three in the same denotation that He is one. This would be a mathematical absurdity. Man and his wife are not two and one in the same signification. They are one in the sense of their union being so close that there is no room for polygamy, divorce, or adultery. In the institution of marriage, God said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). On the other hand, the man and his wife are not the same persons. Their personalities and functions in the union of marriage are different. This illustration is given for the purpose of showing that it is not absurd to say there can be a duality in unity or a trinity in unity. Thus, when one speaks of a man and wife as two in one sense and one in another, he is not saying they are two and one in the same signification. This same logic must be applied when one speaks of the Trinity of God in unity.

I. There is only one substance in the Godhead.

A. The *substance* of God is whatever it is to be God.

1. Substance or essence proves that God is a real, actual Being, because that which has no substance of any kind is a nonentity. Substance means reality of a certain kind, whether of God or of the created order.

2. A substance possesses properties. It has been defined as that which possesses any sort of power to affect or to be affected by another. Substance is also defined as that which has the power of doing or suffering in relation to some other existing thing. Hence, the definition of being or substance is simply, power.
  3. Whether substance is defined as entity having properties, or as entity having power, God is a substance. God has attributes which He manifests in His works of creation, providence, redemption, and judgment; He also has power which He exerts in the universe of matter and mind. The Psalmist said, "I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah" (Ps. 77:3). Terror in the soul because of God is as vivid a form of consciousness as any physical sensation. Man cannot be terrified by a nonentity.
- B. God, in substance, is a spiritual entity.
1. God is not a material but a spiritual substance. A material substance is both limitable and divisible, but the infinite Spirit of God is neither.
  2. A material substance is outwardly moved upon, but a spiritual substance is inwardly moved. This is the most important point in the distinction between the material and the spiritual. The spiritual moves voluntarily; whereas, the material is moved mechanically.
  3. The fact of a spiritual substance in the Godhead is proved by the human intellect. Man's soul is indivisible and has a subsistence of its own, separate from and independent of the body. Man commonly speaks of the never ceasing existence of his soul. Disembodied souls are capable of suffering and enjoyment (Luke 16:19-31). The question, Where is the soul of a man who died one hundred years ago? is more easily answered than, Where is the body of a man who died one hundred years ago? According to Ecclesiastes 12:7, the body returns to the dust and the spirit returns to God. In reference to the spiritual nature of God, man possesses an innate idea of God (John 1:9). There is no such person as a true atheist. Paul said, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32). This verse teaches that all men have (1) an inner knowledge of God concerning the reality of sin; (2) an inner consciousness that God hates and judges sin; (3) a seared conscience that persists in sin and condones sin committed by others. Every person who claims to be an atheist should be asked the question that Dr. Barnhouse asked a man who claimed to be an atheist. He said: "It may be of no concern to you what my opinion of that statement is, but I would like to ask you one question. I know from the Word of God that a man who says there is no God is a fool, and in the Hebrew sense this means that he is insane. Now the question is this: Were you telling the truth when you said you did not believe that there is a God, for I want to know whether you are crazy or a liar. For there is no alternative. Not only do all men know there is a God, but they know that He must hate and judge sin." Such innate knowledge, however, does not create any hatred of sin, and



neither does it give a disposition of heart to repent of sin. Hatred of sin and the disposition to repent of it are the fruits of regeneration.

II. God is personal because He is three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There must be a distinction between substance and Persons.

- A. *Substance* or essence is that which the different Persons in the Godhead have in common. There is one life substance existing consciously as three Persons. The three Divine Persons are not related to the Divine substance as Peter, James, and John to human nature; they are only one God (I John 5:7). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are inherently one. Each Person wholly possesses the Divine nature (Col. 2:9; John 10:30; 14:11; II Cor. 5:19). In referring to the nature of God, it is better to speak of the *personality* of the essence or substance rather than the *Person* of the substance. The substance is not one Person, but three Persons. To say that the substance is a Person conflicts with the statement that God is three Persons.
- B. *Person*, studied theologically, is used in a sense different from its other usages. For instance, the Divine essence cannot be at once three Persons and one Person if *Person* is employed in one signification; but it can be at once three Persons and one personal Being. The personal characteristic by which the Persons of the Godhead differ from each other cannot be the personal characteristic of the entire Godhead. The word *Person*, like the word *Trinity*, is not found in connection with the three subsistences within the Godhead. However, the idea which the word *Person* expresses is scriptural. *Person*, as the word is related to the Godhead, does not mean that each Person stands separately from the other Persons as one human person stands from every other human person. Thus, the term *Person* is but an imperfect manner of expressing a truth that transcends man's comprehension. *Person* is used to express an idea of *personality* within the Godhead, which guards against a mere form of manifestation on one hand and the idea of fully independent personalities in human beings on the other. This is the best way of protecting the Biblical doctrine of Trinality in unity against the heresies of modalism and tritheism.

## DISTINCTION OF PERSONS IN THE INDIVISIBLE GODHEAD

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one (I John 5:7).

One should speak of God with the same degree of reverence as if he were in the conscious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Foolish speech manifests foolish thoughts; whereas, sound speech unveils a sound mind, the fruit of sound doctrine. Paul said to Titus "...speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Again, he said, "Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:8). The statement "...that cannot be condemned..." does not indicate that it will not be condemned by men void of sound judgment; but it means speech that harmonizes with Scripture. Finally, Paul said to Timothy, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7). The order of sound doctrine, sound mind, and sound speech cannot be overemphasized.

Sound doctrine is prerequisite to a sound mind. The doctrine of the Trinity--distinction of Persons in the indivisible God--is indispensable to the Christian faith. All that is Christian hinges on the truth of the Biblical relation that God is one, eternal, personal, and triune. The Christian cannot think of the unity of the Godhead apart from the Trinity; moreover, he cannot distinguish between the Persons in the Godhead separate from the unity. God's unity is an Old Testament revelation. Such statements as, "...Let us make man in our image..." (Gen. 1:26), "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language..." (Gen. 11:7), "...Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts..." (Is. 6:3), "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?..." (Is. 6:8), and "...now the Lord God, and his Spirit hath sent me" (Is. 48:16) are sufficient proof that the Holy Spirit directed the use of the plural pronoun with reference to God--with a view to the future revelation of the Trinity. As the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, the Trinity of the New is hidden in the Old. Furthermore, as the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament, the unity of the Godhead in the Old is unfolded in the Trinity of the New. Hence, the revelation of the Trinity of God in the New Testament gives meaning to the unity of God in the Old Testament. References to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit give a Divine interpretation of the unity of God in the Old Testament. The tripersonality of the Divine nature is not temporal but eternal--eternal Father, eternal Son, and eternal Spirit. If God is nothing more than a simple unit, there can be no mediator or redeemer. Only one who is God can reconcile man to God. The reconciliation of man to God is through and in a Mediator. Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, is that Mediator (I Tim. 2:5; II Cor. 5:19-21).

The sound mind must have sound doctrine as its foundation. An unsound mind may be said to be one filled with false perceptions. The person whose mind is in this state does not see things as they really are; his view is distorted. Different ways by which the mind may be perverted are credulity, prejudice, and tradition. Soundness of mind is opposed to gullibility. Credulousness springs from a misapprehension of the nature and value of evidence. The credulous person believes on insufficient authority. Human interpretation is not to be despised, but it must be based on the rules of

interpretation. When interpretative laws are ignored, the interpretation itself must be rejected. Regardless of the interpreter, the sound mind does not hastily believe his statements. In other words, the sound mind is not gullible; it demands adequate evidence. Soundness of mind resists prejudice--an opinion formed before evidence is given. It has been said that prejudice is a great timesaver; it enables a person to form an opinion without gathering facts. The sound mind desires all available evidence before making a decision. Finally, soundness of mind withstands human tradition. Tradition can be either good or bad. Apostolic traditionalism is not only to be received but maintained. It is Divinely given and is trustworthy. Traditionality of men, however, may or may not be trustworthy; it is not Divinely given. We must not romanticize the traditional teachings of the church fathers; that is, we must not give those men a quality which they did not possess. That would disparage the authority of the tradition of the apostles. The greatest mistake made by religionists is the sin of embracing the traditions of men. Thus, they make void the word of truth (Mark 7:1-13). The sound mind is more literally self-control. Such self-mastery is described as a Divinely bestowed gift (II Tim. 1:7).

Sound speech proceeds from the person who possesses a sound mind. It has been said that as the *manner* of teaching must be untainted, the *matter* must be sound or wholesome (Titus 2:1,8). Christians must conduct their lives in such a manner that their opponents will have no opportunity to bring a report contrary to the Scriptures against them. Great truths should be simply stated. Both meaning and speaking must be within the bounds of Scripture (I Pet. 4:11; Is. 8:20). Ezra's interpretation of the word was in harmony with the words he had read to the people (Neh.8:8). One must be very careful to use Scriptural terminology when he discusses the doctrine of the Divine Triunity. Human reason must not be allowed to enter into his conversation and thus scatter foreign terms, which become the cause of quarrels about words of no profit. The truth that in the unity of God there is a trinity of Persons can be affirmed only on the ground of Divine revelation. The knowledge of God by revelation projects the Scriptures to the center of the stage for discussing the distinction of Persons in the indivisible God. Without a trinity of Persons there cannot be a living unity in the Godhead. The revelation of the Trinity is not confusing, but some of the interpretations of that revelation are misleading and others are heretical.

- I. The titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit belong to Persons--not to the Godhead.
  - A. The Father is not God apart from the Son and the Holy Spirit.
    1. The title *Father* designates that distinction in the indivisible Divine nature by which God is related to the Son and through the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world and to the elect in the world.
    2. The Father is recognized as God.

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27). "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto

- obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (I Pet. 1:2). "And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11).
3. The Father is the first in *order*. "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (I John 5:7). The Father is first in order, not in dignity; He is first in priority, not in superiority. That does not indicate that the Father is the first in Deity, because each Person of the Godhead is Divine. Neither does it signify that the Father is first in time, because each Person is eternal. The passage simply means that one Person is first, one Person is second, and one Person is third in a logical order.
  4. The love of the Father is the great discovery of the gospel (John 3:16; Eph. 1:4-6; Rom. 5:5-8). This love flows through the redemption purchased by Christ and is shed in the hearts of the elect by the Spirit. Not one drop of the Father's love falls outside of Jesus Christ (I John 4:8-10).
- B. The Son is not God apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit.
1. The title *Son* designates that distinction in the indivisible Godhead by which the Son is related to the Father and Father and Son are mutually related to the Holy Spirit.
  2. The Son is recognized as God. "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). "Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever..." (Rom. 9:5). "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). "But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever..." (Heb. 1:8). "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (I John 5:20). "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).
  3. The Son is the second in order. He is the Person sent by the Father; therefore, He is peculiarly the Mediator. As the Divine Person, Jesus Christ was given the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). Had the Spirit of grace been given to the Son of God by measure it would have been exhausted by men. If the human nature of Christ were separated from the Divine nature, grace and mercy would soon be exhausted. However, when the human nature is inseparably united to the infinite fountain of Deity, there is no fear of that opened fountain ever running dry.
  4. The *Begotten* is not the Begetter (Ps. 2:7; Luke 1:35; John 1:18). The virgin birth of Christ was wrought by the third Person of the Trinity, thus the second Person of the Godhead became the Mediator. In this sense, Christ was begotten in the course of human history at a particular time. This begetting, however, was not the origin of His being. The begetting is to be understood in a *revelatory* and *declaratory* sense. In the incarnation, God the Father declared and

revealed that Jesus Christ is His Son. The begetting of Christ, therefore, is unique--the only one of its kind. The term *firstborn* asserts priority of existence--not coming into being.

- C. The Holy Spirit is not God apart from the Father and the Son.
1. The title *Spirit* designates that distinction in the indivisible Godhead by which the third Person is related to the Father and the Son. He is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, and He is sent by both the Father and the Son.
  2. The Holy Spirit is recognized as God. "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost,... thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God" (Acts 5:3,4). "... ye are the temple of God...the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (I Cor. 3:16). "...your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which* is in you, which ye have of God..." (I Cor. 6:19). "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (I Cor. 12:4-6). "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen" (II Cor. 13:14).
  3. The Holy Spirit is the third Person in order. He is the Person sent by both Father and Son. The life-giving power of the Spirit is manifested in Christ's discourses with Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria (John 3;4). Even though the Scriptures speak of Him as sent, given, and poured out, yet, He is not inferior, created, or servile. To sin against the Spirit is to sin against all the authority of God.
  4. The Holy Spirit is peculiarly the Comforter. As God, He is said to come out of His place (Is. 26:21). His testifying of Christ cannot be assigned to Him in respect to His eternality but to His actual coming to apply the redemption wrought out by Christ on the cross. He is the Person who regeneratively illuminates the mind and heart to behold the objective Christ. The Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:13-15). He sheds the love of the Father that flows through Christ into the heart (Rom. 5: 5).

## II. The nature of God is undivided in the Persons of the Trinity.

- A. The three equal and eternal Persons of the Godhead are the proper and equal Objects of Christian worship.
1. There is no worship of the Father apart from the Son and Spirit. Through the Son we have access to the Father, by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18).
  2. There is no worship of the Son apart from the Father and the Spirit. He who honors the Father must equally honor the Son (John 5:23). No person is able to honor either the Father or the Son apart from the Spirit (I Cor. 2:12-16).
  3. There is no worship of the Spirit apart from the Father and the Son. In true worship, one recognizes that it is through the

- power of the indwelling Spirit that he is able to behold the beauty of the Son, as He is the express image of the Father.
- B. There is an inseparable interdependence between the Persons of the Divine essence.
1. The purpose of the Father is to reveal Himself. The sun is as dependent on the sunlight as the sunlight is on the sun. God the Father, therefore, is as dependent on the Son as the Son is dependent on the Father. Without the Son the Father would not properly be Father. The Father requires for His love a personal as well as an infinite Object. If there is no Trinity in the Divine nature, Fatherhood in God has had a beginning and shall have an ending. This would make Sonship an imperfection, ordained for a temporary purpose. If God were simply one person, He would have had to wait until creation was accomplished to find an object for His love. His love, therefore, would not have belonged to His inmost nature but to His relation to some of His creatures. The statement "...God is love" (I John 4:8) could not be the expression of a truth about the Divine nature. The Trinity, however, tells us something about God's absolute and essential nature. It tells us not only what God is to *us* but what He is *in Himself*. Without a Trinity there can be neither redemption nor regeneration.
  2. The Son is as dependent on the Father as the sunlight is on the sun. As the unfolded rainbow shows what light is, Christ reveals the nature of God. The eternal revelation of God is the work of Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 18). As the sun cannot be seen except by the sunlight, the Father cannot be seen except by the Son. Christ said, "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father..." (John 14:9). It has been said that God above the world is made known only by God in the world. God transcendent, the Father, is revealed by God immanent, the Son. Fairbairn said, "Theology must be on its historical side Christocentric, but on its doctrinal side theocentric." As the Son is dependent on the Father (John 14:10), He is dependent on the Spirit to make Himself known to men who are subjectively in darkness.
  3. The Holy Spirit is dependent on the Father and the Son. He is the Person of the Godhead who internally reveals God. That which comes from the Father seems to be the work of the Son, and that which returns to the Father seems to be the work of the Spirit. The Son is the believer's Advocate in heaven, and the Spirit is his Advocate on earth (I John 2:1; Rom.8:26,27).

## OBJECTIONS TO THE TRINITY ARE ANSWERED

The term, *the Trinality of God*, is objectionable to some in the realm of professing Christendom. The word *Trinity* is not found in the Scriptures, but an unscriptural word is justified on the principle that it is better to preserve the *truth* of Scripture than the word of Scripture. Many English words are used to express Biblical doctrines, yet the words used are not found in Holy Scripture. For example, the word *vicarious* is used to express the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Is someone foolish enough to discard the substitutionary work of the Son of God on the cross because the word *vicarious* is not found in the Bible? The reply might be made that the Scriptures are very clear concerning Christ being made an offering for sin in the sense of a substitute (I Pet. 3:18). In defense of the trinality of God, the Bible is equally clear concerning the doctrine of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19; Eph. 2:18; I John 5:7).

The New Testament writers could not be classified as men who set forth strange gods. Certain philosophers of the Epicureans accused Paul of being an ignorant plagiarist. Some of them said, "...What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). Men of God can expect the same kind of criticism from depraved religionists when they set forth the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity--God is one in three Persons. The apostles worshipped and proclaimed the God of Israel, and they laid no less emphasis on the unity of God than the Old Testament writers did. New Testament writers did not place two new gods by the side of Jehovah; they presented God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, the God of the Old Testament was the God of the apostles, and their God is a trinity.

The New Testament does not give birth to a new thought of God. We meet in the Bible a firmly established concept of God, but it must be studied in the light of both the Old and New Testaments. When one considers the fact that the Old Testament was written *before* the revelation of God in the only begotten Son and the New Testament was written *after* the incarnation, the answer to the seemingly difficult problem becomes clear. The two Testaments disclose the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prepared for His manifestation; whereas, the New Testament is the product of that manifestation. The times were not ready for the revelation of the trinity of Persons in the unity of the Godhead, *until* the fulness of time had come for God to send into the world His Son as Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier to apply accomplished redemption (I Pet. 1:2,3).

The creating, governing, and redeeming God is the same God before and after the revelation of the Godhead in Jesus Christ. God is immutable. He can no more be changeable in His nature than He can be unrighteous in His actions. God's nature is infinite, and infinity is subject to no changes. God cannot change for the better because He is absolutely perfect, and He cannot change for the worse because He is infinitely perfect. In the light of the doctrine of God's immutability, what God is now He ever was. God is the eternal and immutable I AM; and since the three Persons are the one God now, they must have been one God from eternity.

I. Some deny the Trinity by seeking to make Jesus Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, using the following statements as proof.

A. The Godhead is in Jesus (Col. 2:9). Man-made tradition says that Jesus is in the Godhead.

1. Jesus is the Father (Is. 9:6). He is called the everlasting Father. Jesus said, "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father..." (John 14:9). Again, He said, "I and *my* Father are one" (John 10:30). They could not be two Persons, according to Trinitarian theology, because the Father is in the Son (John 14:10). Jesus claimed that He was the resurrection, the drawing power of God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Father of eternity--creation--lights--spirits, and the coming one. If one denies the Fatherhood of Jesus, then he denies that he is God, for "...*there is but one God, the Father...*" (I Cor. 8:6).
2. Jesus is the Son. Two thoughts come to view in the Scriptures where *Son* is used; they are *humanity* and *time*. The term *eternal Son* is never found in the Bible. If it were, it would teach Jesus as Son forever learning, praying, and not knowing (Heb. 5:8; John 17:1; Mark 13:32). The Bible teaches that Sonship will cease (I Cor. 15:24). Sonship began at Bethlehem; and when the millennium is completed, the Sonship ministry will be finished.
3. Jesus is the Holy Spirit. There is one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). Do Trinitarians imagine that there are three Spirits in the Godhead? There is one Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 8:6), and the Lord is the Spirit (II Cor. 3:17). The titles of the Spirit reveal that He is Jesus in emanation. Who is the abiding One, the Intercessor, and the Paraclete?

B. There are some unanswerable difficulties in the doctrine of Trinitarianism.

1. If Jesus is the incarnation of but one Person of the three Divine Persons, then what about being reconciled to the Father and the Spirit?
2. How is it that only one Person of the Godhead knows the time of the advent? (Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36).
3. Trinitarianism requires three Calvaries. The law of the covenant was that the covenant-maker had to die in order to make the covenant of force. Consistent and logical Trinitarianism would require the death of three Divine Persons.

II. Scripture answers the heresy of seeking to make Jesus Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A. Jesus Christ is the *visible residence* of the Godhead. The nature of God is indivisible; therefore, the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ; and He is also one of the Persons in the Godhead.

1. Jesus Christ is not God the Father. The name *eternal Father* is applied to Jesus Christ in Isaiah 9:6 because it designates Him as the possessor of eternity. He is the eternal Father in the sense that He is the eternal King, according to the description of Psalm 72. Did the Begotten One beget Himself?



Is one so foolish as to think that the same text which announces that "...a son is given..." would also announce the impossible contradiction that the Son is His own Father? As to His eternity, it can be said that He is the *Father of the ages*. There are three important things to be considered about Jesus Christ in John 10:30; 14:7-10,28; and Col. 1:15. First of all, He is sometimes said to be *in the Father*. This is from the unity of their nature. That is the reason Christ said, "I and *my* Father are one" (John 10:30). The reason the personal pronoun *I* precedes Father is that the Son was speaking as God absolutely, not in the capacity of Mediator as in John 14:28. Secondly, *indwelling is not identity*. As the Father is distinct from the Son who is in Him, so the Son is distinct from the Father in whom He is. Jesus Christ is said to be in the believer, and the believer in Christ; but such indwelling does not make Christ the believer or the believer Christ. Thirdly, the Son is sometimes said to be the *representative image* of God unto us (Col. 1:15). Every spiritually enlightened mind understands that what can be said about one Person of the Godhead, in respect to creation, providence, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection, can be said about the other Persons of the Godhead. He who honors the Son will equally honor the Father (John 5:23; I John 2:23).

2. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son. Sonship does not apply only to the human nature of Jesus Christ. Human nature is that which the eternal Logos assumed when He descended from the Father, for the purpose of declaring the Father and redeeming the elect (John 1:1,14,18; I John 3:5). All three Persons in the Godhead participated in the incarnation, but only one of them became incarnate. The *Holy Spirit* came upon Mary; He who came upon Mary was the power of *the Highest*; He who was born of the virgin was called the *Son of God* (Luke 1:35). Christ's praying was in the capacity of *Mediator*; His learning was experimental by the things which He suffered; and His ignorance consisted in the distinction between the *existence* and the *manifestation of knowledge*. In I Corinthians 2:2, *know* means *to make known*. The human nature was not the residential subject of omniscience. Christ speaks of His human nature to which all Divine communications were voluntary. At His incarnation Christ resolved not to use, during the days of His flesh, the knowledge which His omniscience as God would afford. The wisdom He used was the illumination of the Spirit given to Him without measure. In His prophetic office, He declared that which lay within His commission; therefore, He was not empowered *as prophet* to make known the day nor the hour of the coming of the King. His first advent was not for the purpose of making known the day nor the hour of His second advent. It is erroneous to say that the Sonship of Christ will cease at the close of the millennium, because there is no such thought of kingship being swallowed up by the Father and the *temporary Son of God* becoming obsolete. The kingdom was promised to the Son of David and His kingdom shall be forever (Luke 1:31-33). The statement that the kingdom will be given up to the Father (I Cor. 15:24) is the fulfillment of prophecy, concerning the Father giving Christ dominion until all His

enemies are subdued. The kingdom is as much the Father's as it is the Son's. The union of Father and Son constitutes oneness in rule and dominion.

3. Jesus Christ is not the Holy Spirit. The *Spirit* in Ephesians 4:4 is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead. Verses five and six refer to the Lord and the Father; hence, we have a close parallel to Ephesians 2:18. God is a Spirit; therefore, God is spiritual in nature (Deut. 4:15-20). The nature of God is immaterial and indivisible. A material body may be dissolved, but the Godhead is not capable of dissolution. Since God is of a spiritual nature, our thoughts about God and our approaches to Him must be spiritual in character. To show the real heresy of those whose depraved minds seek to make Jesus Father, Son, and Spirit, I submit their own statement of doctrine. They say the Father is *Deity*, the Son is *humanity*, and the Spirit is *experience*. If Jesus Christ is nothing more than humanity, these poor deluded people are without a Mediator. A mediator is not a mediator of one, either of God or of man absolutely (Gal. 3:20; I Tim. 2:5). A mere nature cannot mediate.

- B. The so-called unanswerable arguments against Trinitarianism are easily answered from Scripture.
  1. Reconciliation is effected by the Father making the Son an offering for sin (II Cor. 5:19-21). In His death the Son satisfied Divine justice; thereby, He enabled the Spirit to apply accomplished redemption to the elect of God. In this manner, the sinner is delivered from sin and guilt and stands in a state of righteousness; therefore, he who was at variance with God is properly said to be reconciled. The requisite to reconciliation is that (1) the wrath of God must be turned away and all the effects of His enmity removed and (2) the sinner must be turned away from his opposition to God and brought into voluntary obedience. Until both of these have been effected, reconciliation is not perfected. When reconciliation is effected, the reconciled sinner has access to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18).
  2. The second question, pertaining to the ignorance of Christ, has already been answered.
  3. The idea of three Calvaries only manifests Biblical ignorance. In the first place, no Divine Person can die. The temple of Christ's body was made a sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:10,14). Finite man cannot make satisfaction to the infinite God who has been injured by sin. Jesus Christ, the infinite Person who possesses two natures, was able to bear the punishment due the elect. In His human nature He was able to give His life a ransom for many; in His Divine nature He was able to go *through* death and satisfy Divine justice. Therefore, the Son of God satisfied the demands of the eternal covenant (Heb. 13:20,21) by being put to death in the *flesh* (human nature) and quickened by the *Spirit* (Divine nature).

## THE SECOND PERSON OF THE GODHEAD IS MEDIATOR

For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (I Tim. 2:5).

Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and men. Thus, in the Mediator, God and men meet with blessing to men and glory to God. This Mediator could not be God absolutely considered because "...a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one" (Gal. 3:20). What God does in a way of grace, He can never perform in the way of mediation. A mediator truly human would be a bridge from man's side which could never reach God's side. Jesus Christ, presented as the one Mediator between God and men, is the only Person qualified as Mediator. He is more than man; He is the God-Man. Jesus Christ is not God and man in the sense of two persons, but He is one Person with two natures--Divine and human.

Paul's statement that *God is one* denotes the unity of God. The oneness of the Godhead stands over against one humanity. God's unity has a bearing on the question of man's salvation. Man's salvation is possible because there are not many gods that can exercise conflicting powers over him; there is only *one God* who justifies the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith (Rom. 3:30).

As far as fallen man is concerned, there was no person in heaven or earth, in his original nature and operations, to undertake the office of Mediator. The Scripture states, "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?..." (I Sam. 2:25). This verse proves that the distance between the infinite God and finite man must be spanned by someone before sinful man can ever approach God. Job said, "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, *that* might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is the answer to man's need. The Son of God was both infinite and finite due to His two natures--Divine and human--being united in the one Person. Jesus Christ, therefore, could lay one hand upon God the Father because of His Divine nature; He could, at the same time, lay one hand upon the sinner because of His human nature. Hence, the Divine answer to man's sin is grace, and the supreme manifestation of this grace is Jesus Christ. When Christianity expresses what she knows of Christ, she calls Him the God-Man.

If Jesus Christ came into the world like all other men, He is like all other men. If the Lord Jesus does not differ from us in origin, He does not differ from us in other respects; therefore, He cannot be our Saviour. The ultimate reason for the incarnation is found in the sin of man. Sin requires atonement, and atonement requires the God-Man. Only a Divine-human religion, having the God-Man for its center and object, can be the Christian religion. To the sin of man the grace of God replied with the greatest gift of all gifts--the gift of the God-Man. The Son of God must belong to us that He might represent us, but He must also be above us to enable us to come to the Father through Him.

How can the Son of God and the Son of Man be united in one? It is suggested that Godhead and manhood are opposites; therefore, they exclude one another. That would be true if they were opposed to each other as finite and infinite. The answer to this is found in the fact that man was

made in the image of God; hence, God inclines toward man and imparts His likeness to man. His desire is with the sons of men (Prov. 8:31). When we speak of the God-Man, we combine into a unity Godhead and manhood which is an unparalleled fact in history. Let us not be guilty of sliding over the true humanity of Jesus Christ or passing lightly over His Deity. Improper understanding of the God-Man has led to serious heresies in the past, and our day is no different.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man, bore in His Person the greatest possible contradiction between what He appeared to be and what He actually was. This contrast became more evident in His earthly life until it reached a climax in His death. When He who is eternal life sank in death in order to become our life, a contradiction occurred that no one apart from grace could understand. Even then, it was such a mystery that the angels desired to look into it (I Pet. 1:11-13). His death was followed by His resurrection out from among the dead, then the contrasts of life were reconciled because the risen Saviour was in reality that which He was by nature. The resurrection has declared the Deity of the Son. There are four reasons why the Theanthropos or God-Man is called the Son of God. They are His miraculous conception, the high office to which He was appointed, His resurrection out from the dead, and His being made heir of all things. Paul said, "...his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:3,4).

Several years ago, I received a copy of a lecture delivered by one of America's leading *seminary professors* entitled, *No Mediator*. The lecturer made the following assertions: Strictly speaking, Christ is not our Mediator. If we could see that point more clearly we would save ourselves from a lot of error. Such a thought drives a wedge between man and God. He further stated that he would have to concede that the term mediator is used in one place; but if one builds on that text he will come out with what is very emphatic in Roman theology and what comes out in a lot of Protestant theology, a second god pleading with the first god for us. The remarks of the *professor* exemplify the heresy that is taught in some religious schools of theology. Furthermore, Mediator is used in more than one place (I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

God has communicated with man in three different ways: (1) Adam, in a state of uprightness, needed no mediator. (2) Under the covenant of the law, God had a mediator of communication. This was simply a communication of words. Moses said to Israel, "(I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to shew you the word of the Lord: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying, I *am* the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 5:5,6). (3) Under the new covenant, Jesus Christ is the Mediator of reconciliation. As the Mediator of the New Testament, Christ has produced peace between God and man (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

#### I. Man's depravity requires a Mediator.

Man, due to his lost condition, needs to be reconciled to God (Rom. 5:6-11).

- A. The fact that there is a Mediator proves that man is alienated from God. Here is a case in which it can never be said that there is blame on both sides. God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions (Gen. 1:26, 27; Eccl. 7:29).
- B. Man cannot have a mediator within himself. He cannot be his own mediator. No man can indiscriminately be a mediator. Therefore, there must be a third person for mediation to be a reality. He must be distinct from both between whom He mediates. He must be capable of representing both.

## II. A mediator stands between two parties.

The necessity of a mediator to stand between God and man indicates that there is a prosecutor against man. This prosecutor is none other than Satan (Job 1:6; Rev. 12:10).

- A. Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the elect, differs from false mediators and lying priests. Christ is not content to negotiate, as a third person, between God dwelling in light and man dwelling in darkness. He is one with those whom He makes one in Himself (John 17:9-23). Jesus Christ is first the Mediator of *reconciliation*, then of *intercession*. The elect are reconciled to God by Christ's death; they are saved through His interceding life (Rom. 5:10). There is no mediator of intercession except the one who is first the Mediator of redemption and reconciliation (Col. 1:20, 21; II Cor. 5:19).
- B. Many who look on reconciliation as something real make it unreal by believing in universal atonement. If Christ's redemption is universal, then all are redeemed from the captivity of Satan. There cannot be two payments for sin, one by Jesus Christ and the other by the sinner. Jesus Christ laid down His life for the sheep, and He intercedes for those for whom He died.

## III. Jesus Christ is the only Person who is qualified to stand between God and man.

If man is ever to be reconciled to God, it must be through Jesus Christ--the one Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5).

- A. The two natures of Jesus Christ--Divine and human--qualify Him to be the Mediator.
  - 1. Jesus Christ is not God and man in the sense of two persons, but in the sense of one Person with two natures--Divine and human. The Lord Jesus is hereby able to draw near to both God and man and draw us together through His redeeming and reconciling work. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). The wrath of God must be turned away and all the effects of His enmity toward the elect must be removed to make perfect reconciliation. Furthermore, the elect must be turned away from their opposition to God and brought into

voluntary obedience to the one true and living God. Both of these requirements are fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How can reconciliation be placated with universal redemption?

2. Jesus Christ is not Mediator in place only, as Moses was when he stood between God and the people; He is Mediator in Person and Work. As Jesus Christ is Divine, He is different from man; as He is clothed with an impeccable human nature, He is different from God absolutely considered. The Lord Jesus, as Mediator, was to be born under the law, to be subject to it, and to fulfill it by keeping it. As the Mediator of the elect, the Lord Jesus must die and overcome death that the elect might be delivered from the penalty and power of death. The Son of God would not have had a life to lay down in death if He had not assumed a nature in which He could die; no Person of the Godhead can die.
- B. Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Godhead, is the one suitable for mediation.
1. The Person to serve as Mediator is called to and sent by another to that office. Father, the first Person of the Godhead is not mediator because He is not the Son, the Son of David, or born of woman. The Holy Spirit, the third Person, is not the proper Person for mediator because He is sent by both the Father and the Son. He works from the Son and glorifies the Son. It was meet, therefore, that the Son of God be Mediator. Redemption must be accomplished by the Son who sent the Spirit to apply accomplished redemption to the elect of God.
  2. The Father is the Person to whom redemption is to be paid by the Son in the power of His eternal spirit. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Heb.9:14-17). Christ's offering was an act of His entire Person. This dignity was given to the sacrifice of Himself. This does not diminish the fact that the work the Son of God did in His human nature, He performed by the power of the Holy Spirit who was given to Him without measure (John 3:34).

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD  
(Naturalistic Theism)

Theology, the science of God, demands the attention of every person without exception. The word *theology* is a combination of *theos* (God) and *logos* (rational expression). Therefore, theology means *the rationale which treats of God*; it is the study of God and His relationship to His creation.

The word *systematic* in the study of theology is derived from *sunistano*, signifying to *set together*. The English interpretation of the Greek word means to organize Biblical data into a system or method. It is clear to the student of Scripture that the Holy Spirit in giving to us the Scriptures has not reduced the truths of the Bible into any system or order. The nearest thing to order is given in the Epistle to the Romans. Thus, all the facets of some particular doctrine are not methodically given under the same heading. Doctrinal truths are dependent on one another for support; therefore, they may be correlated into an order for Christian edification. This fact reveals the reason unsaved persons cannot understand the Scriptures.

Truths have their power upon the minds of men not only from the truths themselves but also from their position in Scripture when they are impressed on minds and hearts by the indwelling Spirit of regeneration. The *gift* of teaching elders--those who have the unique gift of finding and formulating truths for the spiritual benefit of the churches--is given to the church for the purpose of systematically correlating Scriptures (Eph. 4:11-16; II Tim. 3:14-17). A warning must be inserted here because there is no perfectly accurate man-made system of theology. Since interpretation is in the human realm, the appropriate title of every work should be *A (not The) Systematic Theology*. That would indicate that serious effort has been made to systematically set forth the Biblical data concerning God.

The subject of theology should be divided into *naturalistic* and *Biblical* because there is a twofold division of the human family into *saved* and *unsaved*. Naturalistic theology is found within the range of reason. Reason apart from revelation is the highest capacity in man. Therefore, God speaks to every man through nature. However, Biblical theology surpasses the revelation of God in nature. Reason and revelation are united factors in gathering and classifying Biblical data, but one must understand that Scripture surpasses reason as the thoughts of God surpass those of men (Is. 55:8-10). Though men possess the ability to reason, separated from the Spirit of God in regeneration, their reason lacks the capacity to classify and understand Biblical theology (I Cor. 2:14).

There is a *natural* knowledge of God apart from the revelation of Scripture, and that is the point of emphasis in this lesson. That knowledge is both *sufficient* and *insufficient*. This is not a contradiction; it is a statement that must be understood in the light of the context of Romans 1:19,20. The revelation of God in nature is sufficient to render every man without excuse. Nevertheless, it is insufficient to convert a regenerated person because the gospel of Christ is not revealed in nature (Rom. 1:16,17).

There are men today who demand forms of evidence for God's existence that are not to be found in the scope of scientific endeavor. Their questions concerning God's existence presuppose a sort of omniscience on their part. Their failure to see God in the light of the *things that are made* (Rom. 1:20) is due to a preassumed position; they have determined that God shall have no place in their thoughts. Paul, by Divine inspiration, plainly reveals that the knowledge of God's existence is made known in all men: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them" (Rom. 1:19). The reason this knowledge of God is said to be manifest *in them* is that the manifestation of truth to men presupposes *the spirit of man* (I Cor. 2:11)--that part of man which knows what goes on within himself.

Man's history began with the knowledge of God, but his religious history is marked by devolution rather than evolution. The knowledge of God was handed down from Adam to his children. After the destruction of the antedeluvian world by water, Noah began the new world by erecting an altar to God. With this knowledge of God, the new race through Noah and his sons began to manifest its ingratitude to God and cease to glorify Him. Consequently, man's apostasy from God is not the act of an ignorant intellect; it is the act of a depraved will that is determinately set against the eternal power and being of God. Both the eternity of God and the eternity of His power are implied.

I. Naturalistic theism is made known apart from Scripture (Rom. 1:18-32).

- A. A natural knowledge of God is *manifested in all men without exception*--"...that which may be known of God is manifest in them..." (Rom. 1:19).
1. This verse reveals the fact that some knowledge of God is in all men without exception, whether or not the gospel of Jesus Christ ever reaches them.
  2. The expression *manifest in them* must not be confused with the knowledge that is inherent in the conscience of man. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:14,15). *By nature* is contrasted with that which is learned from external sources.
  3. The external revelation of God *in nature* (Rom. 1:19) has made a permanent imprint upon the consciousness of every man. The ariost tense of the verb *shewed* (*ephanerosen*--manifested) reveals the act as having been wrought once for all--"...for God hath shewed *it* unto them."
- B. A natural knowledge of God is *insufficient* to save a person from the knowledge of his guilt--"...that which may be known of God is manifest in them..." (Rom. 1:19).
1. This verse places a *limitation* on the knowledge of God. The content of this knowledge is described in verse 20.
  2. The visible creation makes manifest the invisible perfections of God as the Creator. Invisible things can be seen by the



visible. For example, I can see the Bible that I read and study; but I do not see the writers, printers, or binders. Even though I do not see them, it cannot be denied that these men existed. One can go further and say that the very souls of those men are seen. Man can know the hidden world of his likes and dislikes, his hopes and fears with greater clarity than he can know external appearances. These things can never be ascribed to the solids of our physical nature, but they are living realities. Man is guilty of perverseness when he sees man's mind in his works but refuses to see the mind of God in His works.

3. God's attributes of eternity, omnipotence, and divinity are revealed in nature; but His attributes of love and grace are withheld from this revelation. God who reveals Himself has the right to hide Himself. Man may be known by his outward appearance, but he retains the right to hide his name and identity. God, who is known in His power and Godhead by the things which He has made, retains the right to hide His attributes of love and grace and make them known to the elect in His special work of regeneration.
- C. A natural knowledge of God is *sufficient* to accomplish the end intended--"...so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).
1. Verse 20 proves that enough has been revealed to make all men inexcusable before the sovereign God. There is enough knowledge revealed in nature to condemn every man. Dr. Barnhouse told the story about a student who said to his professor, "I cannot see an atom; therefore, I will not believe in it." The young man flunked the course because he would not submit to evidence. He complained to the professor, but he was without excuse. Why was he without excuse? It can be said that he was without excuse because that which may be known of atoms is manifest, for physical investigation has revealed it. For the invisible things of atomic energy are clearly seen, being understood by the effects that are manifest, so that the student is without excuse. This vividly illustrates Romans 1:19,20.
  2. Not only is the visible creation a work of the invisible God, but it is kept every moment by His invisible authority. Consider the earth which is man's habitation. There are two forces working upon the earth which revolves around the sun. One force tends to draw the earth away from and the other toward the sun. These powers are known as centrifugal and centripetal forces. These two forces must be in perfect balance or the earth would be either destroyed by the heat of the sun or drawn away into darkness and chaos. There are other things just as important to consider. When one thinks about the disposition of land and water, the atmosphere, the seasons, and the structure of the human body, he should give honor to the God of providence.
  3. The natural knowledge of God condemns the popular expression, "It is not the sin but the Son question about which man is to be concerned." Naturalistic theology has nothing to say about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, but there is enough truth about God to render every man inexcusable before God.

## II. Naturalistic theism indicts all men (Rom. 1:18-32).

- A. The witness of God in *creation* and *conscience* makes all men *responsible* to God (Rom. 1:19,20; 2:14,15). If men were not responsible to God, there could be neither *guilt* nor *punishment*. It is true that these references pertain to the Gentiles, but Paul goes on to show that the Jews are in agreement with the Gentiles (Rom. 2:1-3:8).
1. Man's *reason* is involved when he reflects upon the work of God in creation. Both power and Godhead are viewed in God's handiwork. *Power* refers to God's supremacy and *Godhead* to His Being. The word for Godhead is *theiotes* and reflects on the perfections of God as revealed in creation. The Greek word for Godhead in Colossians 2:9 is not the same word that is used in Romans 1:20. In Colossians 2:9 the word is *theotes* which speaks of the very essence of God revealed bodily in Jesus Christ. The argument used by Paul in Romans 1 is cosmological; thus, the conclusion is that every effect must have a cause. This argument is especially prominent in the gospel of John. (Study John 10:37,38; 15:24,25).
  2. The *conscience* of man is contrasted with the external revelation of God in creation. Man's conscience operates by native instinct. It is the faculty in man whereby he is able to distinguish between right and wrong. The conscience bears witness to the existence of a high moral code and acknowledges that it does not live up to it completely.
- B. The responsibility of all men to God makes them *guilty* before Him.
1. Guilt is manifested by man's failure to glorify or give God thanks for His benevolence--"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21). The conjunction *but (alla)* is the strongest in the Greek. This passage proves that man began with a *natural* knowledge of God derived from creation, but his depraved mind led him to the vanity of his own reasoning. When man refuses to follow the truth that is revealed he wanders in the darkness of his own imagination.
  2. Apart from grace, vain imagination of the mind enters into the heart which is the seat of man's moral nature and the center of his personality. Error enters the mind and reaches the will through the heart; so the truth of the gospel must enter the mind and reach the will through the heart (Rom. 6:17). The first describes reprobation (Rom. 1:18-32), and the second describes true conversion (Rom. 6:17).
- C. All guilty men must be *punished* by the righteous God (Rom. 1:32; 2:2-6).
1. Guilt stands between responsibility and punishment. Responsibility makes guilt possible, and responsibility and guilt make punishment sure.
  2. For one to properly understand punishment, the *attitude* and *action* of God in relation to guilt must be contemplated. God's attitude is expressed in the word *wrath* in Romans 1:18. Wrath is God's inherent antagonism to everything that is evil. The present tense, *is revealed*, proves that God

continually uncovers or brings to light man's irreverence toward Him and denial of His holy standard for man. Finally, God's action, which is a manifestation of His attitude, is stated in the expression, "God gave them up" (Rom. 1:24,26,28). Therefore, the divine verdict on such reprobates is "...that they which commit such things are worthy of death..." (Rom. 1:32).

EVIDENCES FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD  
(Naturalistic Theism Continued)

The question has often been asked, Can the existence of God be proved by arguments? Many philosophers deny that it can. They suggest that knowledge of God is intuitive; therefore, it cannot be proved. The apostle Paul stated that there is a subjective knowledge of God in every man: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God..." (Rom. 1:21). Since the subjective knowledge of the existence of God is an objective fact, it must be revealed and established by evidence.

Men do not have the knowledge of God's holiness, justice, mercy, and love by intuition. These attributes are revealed only by the Spirit of God in regeneration, through the medium of Holy Scripture. Intuitive knowledge, which is universal, is the sense of a supreme Being on whom all men depend and to whom all men are responsible. There is no way of accounting for man's belief in God's existence except that it is founded on the constitution of his nature.

Objection to the atmosphere which sustains man illustrates that one *assumes* that God exists while he argues that He does not. A man once began his argumentation against the existence of God by saying, "I am an atheist, God knows." As a person acknowledges his own existence by doubting it, he admits the existence of God by questioning it. One who denies that God is personal can be likened to the man who went outside of his house and declared that no one lived there, because when he looked through the window he saw no one inside.

A rationalist has been defined as a person who substitutes human *reason* for *Divine revelation*. Hence, to be classified as a rationalist one must have received and rejected some revelation from God. Such men are described by Paul in Romans 1:18-32. The student of Scripture would profit by observing in this passage the references to the revelation of God and also those to the mental nature of man.

The references to the revelation of God in Romans 1:18-32 are as follows:

1. "For the wrath of God is revealed..." (v. 18).
2. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them..." (v. 19a).
3. "...for God hath shewed it unto them" (v. 19b).
4. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen..." (v. 20a).
5. "...being understood by the things that are made..." (v. 20b).

These are the references to man's mental nature in Romans 1:18-32:

1. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [the spirit of man which is capable of understanding--I Cor. 2:11]..." (v. 19a).
2. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen [the perception of the mind]..." (v. 20a).
3. "...being understood [the understanding of the mind] by the

- things that are made..." (v. 20).
4. "Because that, when they knew God [knowing God--the ariost tense denotes the permanency of the knowledge of God], they glorified *him* not as God..." (v. 21a).
  5. "...but became vain in their imagnations [reasonings]..." (v.21b).
  6. "...their foolish heart [the heart is the center of moral understanding, will, and activity] was darkened" (v. 21c).
  7. "And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge [memory]" (v. 28).
  8. "Who knowing the judgment of God..." (v. 32).

Wrong *thinking* leads to improper *loving*, and incorrect *loving* leads to wicked *living*. Education that does not give God His rightful place is worthless. No true philosophy casts aside theology--the science of God. The following indictment can be found in the ashes of every civilization: "Who changed the truth of God into a lie [they exchanged the truth of God for a lie]..." (v. 25).

Romans 1:18-32 proves that the general revelation of God is both objective and subjective. *Subjective knowledge* is given with the image of God in which man was created; *objective knowledge* comes from the world of created things around man. John spoke of subjective knowledge when he declared that Christ "...was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). This verse does not refer to the grace of illumination unto all men without distinction but to common light and nature, which is far less than saving faith. The Psalmist spoke of objective knowledge when he sang, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). Consequently, the subjective and objective aspects of knowledge constitute the general revelation of God which He has given mankind. However, the effect of this general revelation is not that men are kept without sin but that all men are left without excuse.

Naturalistic theism has its place in the study of theology. The Christian is grateful to know that the success of the gospel is not dependent on argument but on the sovereign Spirit alone. A regenerated person does not stagger in the dark; he walks in the light. This does not mean that clear-cut arguments in the realm of naturalistic theism are not valuable. Intuitive truths belong to both the intellect and moral nature of man. It is an intuitive truth that every created effect must have a cause and the part of a thing is less than the whole. Thus, man possesses the mental capacity of understanding basic truths as soon as they are presented. The mind is also capable of recognizing the veracity of moral truths. Every man acknowledges good and evil to some degree; therefore, he agrees that evil deserves to be punished (Rom. 1:32).

Contentions alone do not prove the whole doctrine of theism. Nevertheless, each naturalistic argument does prove some particular element of that doctrine. For example, the cosmological argument proves the existence of a necessary and eternal Being; the teleological emphasizes that such an eternal Being is intelligent; the anthropological stresses that such an intelligent Being possesses moral attributes; the ontological leads to an ideal conclusion.

I. The cosmological argument proves the existence of a necessary and eternal Being.

A. The cosmological argument is defined.

1. The word *cosmological* comes from the Greek *kosmos* which means *world* or *orderly arrangement*. This branch of philosophy deals with the origin and general structure of the universe.
2. The basic principle upon which the cosmological argument advances to its conclusions is that effect must have a cause. To maintain that anything has caused itself to exist is to assert that it acted before it existed. Such a declaration would be absurd. A cause is a real entity; therefore, it is a substance. A nonentity cannot act; nonexistence cannot produce existence.
3. The purpose of the argument is to prove that the universe is not eternal. Some scientists have endeavored to disprove the theory of entropy (energy becomes less available than when it began) by showing that the universe is a perpetual motion machine. However, it is evident that the universe is running down like a clock. Water does not run uphill without force. Heat does not pass from a hot to a cold body. If the universe is running down and at the same time is eternal, does it not stand to reason that it would already be run down? We are taught that most of the energy of the universe comes from the consumption of hydrogen. Would it not be reasonable to say that if the universe were eternal, all the hydrogen would have been consumed by now? Men are always inventing new theories, but they are refuted by facts. If the universe were eternal, it would not be subject to mutation.

B. The cosmological argument has its imperfections.

1. The principle of causality does not require that everything have a cause. If it is maintained that everything has a cause, this principle would apply to God.
2. The principle of causality should be stated differently. It is proper to say that existence itself does not demand a cause, but the coming into being of that which was nonexistent demands a cause.
3. As far as man is able to see, everything that has a beginning had a cause. Therefore, the universe owes its existence to a cause outside of itself.

C. The cosmological argument has value when it is properly applied.

1. Every finite object implies original nonexistence.
2. *Creative* power is demanded to cause a nonentity to become an entity. Consequently, the quality of the cause is *superior* and *older* than the effect.
3. The Scriptures justify the cosmological argument. (Study John 1:1-3; 10:37,38; 15:24,25; Heb. 3:4.) John proves that God, the efficient cause of things in time, existed before time. The *difference* between the Creator and His creation is the principle by which an endless series of causes is avoided.

II. The teleological argument emphasizes that the eternal Being is intelligent.

- A. The teleological argument is defined.
1. The word *teleological* comes from the Greek word *telos* meaning *end* or *design*.
  2. This argument treats the subject of cause as an intelligent Being. Thus, intelligence in the effect proves intelligence in the cause. It is as unreasonable to believe that the Bible was written by chance as to believe that the universe was brought into existence by chance. As every book has an author, the universe has an intelligent Creator.
  3. The intention of the argument is to show that there is design in every part of the universe. All the organs of the human body and all the species of life in the universe are purposive. Each species is modified to meet its particular environment and necessities. There is instinct in all transmitted life. A biology professor once said, "Instinct is inherited memory." Will this stand the test of logic? If an insect learns things from the preceding generation, the first one had to figure everything out by himself. The answer is simple; instinct is imparted wisdom. One of the most decisive proofs of intelligence is prevision. Everyone should bow before the intelligent Creator when he considers that the earth was prepared for man and sustenance is provided for the young before they are born.
- B. The teleological argument is not without its defects.
1. The argument does not prove a personal God. It has been said that the order of the universe may be only the changing phenomena of an impersonal intelligence, such as pantheism supposes.
  2. The teleological argument must be supplemented by the anthropological.
  3. This argument more properly concerns the relation of the intelligent Being to the world than it does His existence. Placing of the intelligence is not the question of this argument.
- C. The teleological argument has value when it is properly applied.
1. This argument, like the cosmological, must not be confined to the material world but extended to the intellectual.
  2. The proper application of the teleological argument is illustrated. An atheistic professor related his visit to the Hoover Dam to a Christian. He told him about his wife observing the rock formations and repeatedly saying, "What wonderful works of God!" The atheist was so well-pleased with his ten year old son's reply to his wife that he had to relate it. The boy said to his mother, "Well, Mom, the rocks had to fall somewhere, didn't they?" The Christian asked, "When you saw the dam with all the materials and their arrangement, did you say to yourself, 'Well, these things had to fall somewhere, didn't they?'" To this the atheist gave no reply.
  3. The Scriptures justify the teleological argument. The Psalmist said, "...he that teacheth man knowledge, *shall not he know*" (Ps. 94:10). The marks of design in the human intellect infer that an infinite, designing mind created it.

III. The anthropological argument stresses that the intelligent Being possesses attributes.

A. The anthropological argument is defined.

1. The word *anthropological* comes from the Greek word *anthropos* meaning man.
2. This argument goes from the mental and moral nature of man to the existence of the Author, Lawgiver, and Judge.
3. Man differs from animals by what anthropologists call culture. Man's behavior is learned, not instinct-born. The intellectual, moral, and emotional nature of man requires an intellectual and moral Being for its Author. Man's mind cannot evolve from matter nor his spirit from flesh. There are several kinds of existence but they are distinct. For instance, vegetable life never develops into animal life and animal life never advances to intellectual life. The moral nature of man proves the existence of a holy Lawgiver and Judge. If this is not true, then conscience cannot be explained (Rom. 2:14,15). Why is man possessed with fears, tortures of a guilty conscience, and dread of a future state? Cain, under the terrors of an evil conscience, thought that every man was his slayer (Gen. 4:14). Man's moral nature involves a sense of responsibility; he knows that he must answer for what he is and does (Rom. 1:32). Man's emotional nature requires a Being for its Author who can satisfy his desires. Finite things, according to Ecclesiastes, can never satisfy. Man's heart is too large for a finite object. The infinite God is required to satisfy man's emotional nature (Ps. 17:15).

B. The anthropological argument has its weak points.

1. The anthropological argument cannot prove the existence of the infinite God because it argues from the finite.
2. This argument does point to a Being of supreme and holy qualities, but it does not compel belief in a God of infinite perfections.
3. The idea of good and bad, right and wrong, does exist in human culture; but apart from the revelation of God in Scripture, this idea is without a complete objective standard.

C. The anthropological argument has great value when it is properly applied.

1. Augustine properly applied it thus: "God is more truly *thought* than He is described, and *exists* more truly than He is thought."
2. The subjective idea of God is less real than the objective fact. This means that God has more of existence than the thought of Him has.
3. Man's conscience indicates self-knowledge. Relative goodness abiding in the conscience of natural man is compared to that which is worse. Out of man's moral conscience proceeds the restraint of evil. Conscience not only recognizes that man was made in the likeness of God, but he is God's opposite. It has been said that conscience is an ideal Moses and thunders from an invisible Sinai.



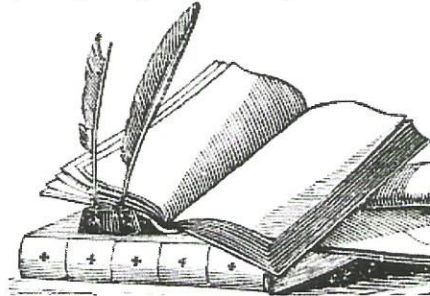
IV. The ontological argument leads to an ideal conclusion of God's existence.

- A. The ontological argument is defined.
1. The word *ontological* is based on the Greek participle of the verb "to be," *on*. This argument is derived, as the etymology (*ton ontos Logos*) denotes, from the idea of absolute in distinction from imperfect being.
  2. This argument reasons from God as the first cause of all things to the things He has caused. Specifically, it refers to the inherent idea that God exists. One may logically conceive of the nonexistence of the finite, but he cannot logically form a thought of the nonexistence of the infinite.
  3. Absolute nonentity is unreasonable; therefore, the ontological argument has the approval of Scripture. "...I AM THAT I AM..." (Ex. 3:14) denotes necessity of existence. Thus, the objective existence of God is more real than one's subjective idea.
- B. The ontological argument is not without its defects.
1. Some have taught that the concept of an absolutely perfect Being includes the idea of existence.
  2. This argument confounds *ideal* existence with *real* existence.
  3. Man's notion is not the measure of external reality. God is not an idea; therefore, knowledge of Him cannot be derived from thoughts. The fact that an infinitely perfect Being cannot be derived from imperfect and finite things confounds the notion of combining the infinite with the finite.
- C. The ontological argument has value when it is properly applied.
1. Every idea in culture has some cause. For example, there must be some explanation for a contemplation of something foreign to one's environment. Those who have never heard of television can have the thought of its existence conveyed only through a region beyond themselves. God created man; man's thought of God is conveyed from a region beyond man himself.
  2. The logical argument for the existence of God is given by Paul in Romans 1:19,20. The evidence is so strong that Paul is justified in saying that those who do not embrace it are without excuse.
  3. God is more than an idea. No person could have an idea unless someone created a creature capable of having a thought. This is a logical argument for the existence of God. It has been suggested that arguments are not so much a bridge in themselves as they are guys (cables) to hold firm the great suspension bridge of intuition by which we pass the gulf from man to God.

*Bible Studies by W. E. Best*

*Available from Spring Assembly of Christ*

<http://SpringAssemblyofChrist.org>



*Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree*

*Controversy Concerning Christ's Eternal Generation*

*Eschatology—The Subject of Last Things*

*God's Changing Providence*

*Nature of the Triune God*

*Studies in Angelology, Satanology and Demonology*

*Studies in The Second Coming of Jesus Christ*

*The Being of God*

*The Only Begotten Son*

*The Subject of Christian Fellowship*

*Without—Excuse*

*Distributed freely by*

*Spring Assembly of Christ*

<http://SpringAssemblyofChrist.org>

July, 2014