

The Ontological Trinity: The Essence and Attributes of the Father, Son, and Spirit

What Does God Say About Himself? – He is One in Essence and Three in Persons

1. The Lord (YHWH) is Supreme

- a. *1 Chronicles 29:11-12a* – “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all.”
- b. *Psalms 115:3* – “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”
- c. *Psalms 135:6* – “Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.”
- d. *Proverbs 21:1* – “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”
- e. *Daniel 4:34-35* – “At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will amongst the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’”
- f. *James 4:13, 15* – “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit...’ – Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”

Concluding Thoughts On God’s Supremacy

- God is supreme because his will is authoritative over his creation.
- God is supreme because he has the power to execute his authoritative will.
- _____

2. The Lord (YHWH) is Eternal

- a. *Isaiah 43:10-11* – “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior.’”
- b. *Isaiah 44:6-8* – “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.’”

October 6, 2021

Concluding Thoughts On God's Eternality

- God is eternal because he was the first and will be the last (this does not mean he will exist in eternal future alone).
- God has chosen those who will believe and understand that he is the God eternal.
- The eternal God is also the one and only savior.

• _____

3. The Lord (YHWH) is Holy

- a. *Exodus 15:11* – “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”
- b. *Leviticus 19:2* – “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”
- c. *Isaiah 6:3* – “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”
- d. *1 Peter 1:15-16* – “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) – “This is the prime way of honouring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services of Him, as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live *to* Him in living *like* Him.”

- e. *1 John 1:5* – “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.”
- f. *Revelation 15:4* – “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Concluding Thoughts On God's Holiness

- Because God is holy he is glorious. God's glory is his holiness (and other attributes) on display.
- God is holy because there is no darkness in Him at all.
- God alone is holy because of his righteousness and is therefore worthy of worship.

• _____

How can God be the only holy one if we are also to be holy?

4. The Lord (YHWH) is Immutable (Unchanging)

- a. *Numbers 23:19* – “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”
- b. *1 Samuel 15:29* – “And also the Glory of Israel [God] will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”
- c. *Job 42:2* – “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (prevented).
- d. *Psalms 33:11* – “The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.”
- e. *Psalms 100:5* – “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”
- f. *Isaiah 46:10-11* – “Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purposes,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass. I have purposed, and I will do it.”
- g. *Jeremiah 31:3* – “The Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”
- h. *Malachi 3:6* – “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”
- i. *Hebrews 6:17-18* – “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the theirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.”

Concluding Thoughts On God’s Immutability

- Eternally the Father, Son, and Spirit are never changing.
- The attributes of God are never changing – his love, mercy, justice, etc.
- Humans cannot change the perfect authoritative will of God, because God’s supremacy is not dependent on man.

If God is immutable in terms of His being and His knowledge, why does God ‘repent’ in Scripture?

Word in Question For Repent

Original Word: נָחַם

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: nacham

Phonetic Spelling: (naw-kham')

Definition: to be sorry, console oneself

- *Genesis 6:6-7* – “And the Lord was sorry that he had made on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for *I am sorry that I have made them.*”
- *1 Samuel 15:11, 35* – “*I regret* that I have made Saul King, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments... And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And *the Lord regretted* that he had made Saul king over Israel.”
- Other passages in KJV where God ‘repents’: Ex. 32:12-14; Deut. 32:36; Judg. 2:18; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15; Ps. 90:13; Ps. 106:45; Ps. 135:14; Jer. 18:8; Jer. 26:3, 13, 29; Jer. 42:10; Joel 2:13-14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9-10; Jonah 4:2
- Other passages in KJV where God does not ‘repent’: Ps. 110:4; Jer. 4:28; Ezek. 24:14

Arthur Pink’s explanation – “When speaking of himself, God frequently accommodates his language to our limited capacities. He describes himself as clothed with bodily members, as eyes, ears, hands, etc. He speaks of himself as ‘waking’ (Ps. 78:65), as ‘rising early’ (Jer. 7:13); yet he neither slumbers nor sleeps. When he institutes a *change in his dealings with men*, he describes his course of conduct as ‘repenting.’”

Final Concluding Thoughts

1. God’s supremacy is seen in his eternally unchanging holiness (Divine Simplicity).
2. Because God is one in essence who subsists (exists) as Father, Son, and Spirit, then these attributes of God belong to all three persons.
3. The authoritative will of God (Father, Son, and Spirit) is eternal (Eph. 1:11).
4. The Father, Son, and Spirit is the one supreme, eternal, holy, and immutable God.
5. There are no ontological attributes (besides eternal relations of origin – the relations of Fatherhood, Sonship, & Spirit of God) that belong to a single person of God alone.
6. The only thing that distinguishes the different persons of the Godhead, ontologically, is that the Father is the Father of the Son, the Son is the Son of the Father, and the Spirit is the Spirit (Breath) of the Father and Son (Eternal Relations of Origin).

October 6, 2021

Developing a Theological Vocabulary - taken from the glossary from Matthew Barrett's book *Simply Trinity*.

1. *Ontological/Imminent* – “The Trinity in and of itself, apart from creation and salvation.”
2. *Functional/Economic* – “God’s operations toward the created order (creation, providence, or redemption). God reveals his triune identity by means of the economy, but is not constituted by the economy.”
3. *Begotten* – “To come forth, to proceed. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father’s essence. Only the Son is begotten. Other terms: eternal generation
4. *Spiration* – “Reflects the name ‘Spirit.’ The Spirit is spirated, eternally breathed out by the Father and Son. Since the Spirit is not another Son, he is not begotten but spirated.
5. *Subsistence* – “Another way to referring to a divine person. The one, simple divine essence subsists or exists in three persons. Each person is a subsisting relation of the divine essence. The divine essence has three modes of subsistence.
6. *Eternal Relations of Origin* – “Distinguishes how each person is related to another, identifying the everlasting provenance (principle/origin/source) from which each person proceeds. Paternity: the Father is unbegotten (without origin), and therefore the eternal origin of the Son. Filiation: the Son’s origin is the Father, begotten (generated) from the Father’s essence from all eternity. Spiration: the Father and the Son are the origin of the Spirit, spirating the Spirit from all eternity. The relations alone distinguish the persons, identifying each person’s personal property. Another phrase, essence of God eternally subsists in each person. Hence, persons are subsisting relations.”

Reflection From The Week:

- Read John 14-17 with a trinitarian lens and write out the attributes of God you see in this passage.

Preparation For Next Week:

- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/doctrine-inseparable-operations/>

Resources For Going Further:

Matthew Barrett, *None Greater*

Michael Bird and Scott Harrower, *Trinity Without Hierarchy*

Stephen Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*

Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*