

## DTP – Second Year – Grace Bible Church

### THEOLOGY PROPER I - THE DOCTRINE OF THE BEING OF GOD

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ”

Psalm 14:1

"And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

John 17:3

#### I. CHRISTIAN THEISM

A. Defined: The belief that all that exists in both the natural and supernatural realm was brought into existence and is maintained by a personal, infinite triune God who has revealed Himself to man.

B. Contextualized:

1. Supernaturalism: There are two realms of reality, a natural realm and a supernatural realm, both of which are equally real and dependent for their existence upon the creative activity of one or more Supreme Beings.

2. Deism: “Belief in a God who created but has no continuing involvement with the world and events within it.” Erickson, Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology, pg. 42

C. Features of Christian Theism:

1. God is infinite and personal (Triune), transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign and good. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, pg. 24.

2. God created the cosmos *ex nihilo* to operate with a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system. Ibid., pg. 26-27

3. God can and does communicate with man. Ibid., pg. 32

4. Ethics is transcendent and is based on the character of God as good (holy and loving). Ibid., pg. 38.

5. History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God’s purposes for man. Ibid., pg. 40

D. Completeness of Christian Theism: “Christian theism is primarily dependent on its concept of God, for theism holds that everything stems from Him. Nothing is prior to God or equal to Him. He is He Who Is. Thus theism has a basis for metaphysics. Since He Who Is also has a worthy character and is thus The Worthy One, theism has a basis for ethics. Since He Who Is also is He Who Knows, theism has a basis for epistemology. In other words, theism is a complete world view.” Ibid., pg. 42

## E. Denials of:

### 1. Absolute Denial - Atheism: The belief that there is no God.

a. Analyzed: "In the last analysis atheism results from the perverted moral state of man and from his desire to escape from God. It is deliberately blind to and suppresses the most fundamental instinct of man, the deepest needs of the soul,... This practical or intellectual suppression of the operation of the *semen religionis* [God consciousness] often involves prolonged and painful struggles." Berkhof, Systematic Theology, pg. 22.

### b. Practical Atheism Among Non-Christians

#### 1). Description:

"They are not necessarily notoriously wicked in the eyes of men, but may belong to the so-called 'decent men of the world,' though respectably indifferent to spiritual things. Such people are often quite conscious of the fact that they are out of harmony with God, dread to think of meeting Him, and try to forget about Him. They seem to take a secret delight in parading their atheism when they have smooth sailing, but have been known to get down on their knees for prayer when their life was suddenly endangered." Ibid., p. 22

#### 2). Passages:

Psalm 10:4

Psalm 14:1

Romans 3:10-12, 18

### c. Practical Atheism Among Christians

#### 1). Regarding Our Salvation:

"No practical atheist ever yet turned to God, but was turned by God; and not to acknowledge it to God is a part of this atheism, since it is a robbing God of the honor of one of his most glorious works. If this practical atheism be natural to man ever since the first taint of nature in Paradise, what can be expected from it, but a resisting of the work of God, and setting up all the forces of nature against the operations of grace, till a day of power dawn and clear up upon the soul? Not all the angels in heaven, or men upon earth, can be imagined to be able to persuade a man to fall out with himself; nothing can turn the tide of nature, but a power above nature. God took away the sanctifying Spirit from man, as a penalty for the first sin; who can regain it but by his will and pleasure? Who can restore it, but he that removed it? Since very man hath the same fundamental atheism in him by nature and would be a rule to himself and his own end, he is so far from dethroning himself, that all the strength of his corrupted nature is alarmed up to stand to their arms upon any attempt God makes to regain the fort.

...Man cannot rise to an acknowledgment of God without God; he may as well become heaven, the devil be changed into an angel of light. ...

An atheist by nature can no more alter his own temper, and engrave in himself the divine nature, than a rock can carve itself into the statue of a man, ...

That soul that by nature would strip God of his rights, cannot, without a divine power, be made comfortable to him, and acknowledge sincerely and cordially the rights and glory of God.” Charnock, Exist. & Attrib. Of God, 1:165-66

## 2). Regarding Our Sanctification:

“Let us be sensible of it in ourselves. Have any of our hearts been a soil wherein the fear and reverence of God hath naturally grown? Have we a desire to know him, or a will to embrace him? Do we delight in his will, and love the remembrance of his name? Are our respects to him, as God, equal to the speculative knowledge we have of his nature? Is the heart, wherein he hath stamped his image, reserved for his residence? ...

Have there not been frequent neglects of God? Have we not been deaf whilst He hath knocked at our doors? Slept when He hath sounded in our ears, as if there have been no such being as a God in the world? How many strugglings have been against our approaches to Him! Hath not folly often been committed, with vain imaginations starting up in the time of religious service, which we would scarce vouchsafe a look to at another time, and in another business, but would have thrust them away with indignation? Had they stept in to interrupt our worldly affairs, they would have been troublesome intruders; but while we are with God they are acceptable guests.

...Are not our minds bemisted with an ignorance of Him, our wills drawn by aversion from Him, our affections rising in distate of Him? More willing to know anything than His nature, and more industrious to do anything than His will? Do we not all fall under some one or other of these considerations? Is it not fit, then, that we should have a sense of them? It is to be bewailed by us, that so little of God is in our hearts, when so many evidence of the love of God are in the creatures; that God should be so little our end, who hath been so much our benefactor; that He should be so little in our thoughts, who sparkles in everything which presents itself to our eyes.” Ibid., pp. 167-68

## 2. Relative Denial - Agnosticism:

### a. Word meaning: “not knowing.”

b. Explanation: The objective of agnosticism is to discredit certitude in the field of human knowledge. There are softcore agnostics - "I do not know if God exists." There are hardcore agnostics - "I do not know if God exists and neither do you!"

c. Evaluated: Agnostics discard reasonable proofs for anything, which process, if followed consistently, would eventually eliminate the very proofs they advance for their own theories. Experience is their only source of knowledge, but eventually this will be confined to the present moment alone. Essentially, it is impossible to live consistently with an agnostic view.

### 3. Denial of all Knowledge - Skepticism

a. Defined by Socrates: "All that I know is that I know nothing." Geisler, Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy, pg. 85.

b. Thought process:

1). The first stage is antithesis.

2). The second stage is epoche. [The suspension of judgement. Instead of asserting or denying any one claim on a subject, one must embrace all mutually inconsistent claims and withhold judgment on each of them.]

3). The final stage is ataraxia. [A state of happiness and peace of mind. One is now free from dogmatism!]

## II. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

### A. Definition of "God"

1. Difficulty with the definition!

2. Defining "definition": "If by definition we mean a complete view, so that the subject can be properly grasped, so that we can understand, and, so to speak, exhaust it, we must all say that we cannot give a definition of deity. But the word definition is used in other senses..."

a. An enumeration of the essential attributes or predicates of any being, substance or thing.

b. The logical definition, which consists in giving the *genus* [sort; kind; classification] and *differentia* of any subject. In both these cases, we may attain at least a proximate apprehension of what God is." Smith, Systematic Christian Theology, pg. 7.

### 3. The Attempt of the Westminster Confession:

Chap. 2.1 There is but one only(1) living and true God,(2) who is infinite in being and perfection,(3) a most pure spirit,(4) invisible,(5) without body, parts,(6) or passions;(7) immutable,(8) immense,(9) eternal,(10) incomprehensible,(11) almighty,(12) most wise,(13) most holy,(14) most free,(15) most absolute,(16) working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will,(17) for His own glory;(18) most loving,(19) gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin,(20) the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him;(21) and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments;(22) hating all sin,(23) and who will by no means clear the guilty.(24)

(1)Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4,6.

(2)1 Thess. 1:9; Jer. 10:10.

(3)Job 11:7,8,9; Job 26:14.

(4)John 4:24.

(5)1 Tim. 1:17.

(6)Deut. 4:15,16; John 4:24; Luke 24:39.

(7)Acts 14:11,15.

(8)James 1:17; Mal. 3:6.

(9)1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23,24.

(10)Ps. 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17.

(11)Ps. 145:3.

(12)Gen. 17:1; Rev. 4:8.

(13)Rom. 16:27.

(14)Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8.

(15)Ps. 15:3.

(16)Exod. 3:14.

(17)Eph. 1:11.

(18)Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36.

(19)1 John 4:8,16.

(20)Exod. 34:6,7.

(21)Heb. 11:6.

(22)Neh. 9:32,33.

(23)Ps. 5:5,6.

(24)Nah. 1:2,3; Exod. 34:7.

### 4. The Attempt of the Shorter Catechism:

Q. 4 What is God? A. God is a Spirit,(1) infinite,(2) eternal,(3) and unchangeable,(4) in his being,(5) wisdom,(6) power,(7) holiness,(8) justice, goodness, and truth.(9)

(1)John 4:24

(2)Job 11:7-9

(3)Ps. 90:2

(4)James 1:17

(5)Exod. 3:14

(6)Ps. 147:5

(7)Rev. 4:8

(8)Rev. 15:4  
(9)Exod. 34:6,7

## B. Arguments for God's Existence:

1. The position of the *evidentialist*: The existence of God can be proved from factors within the world. "Appealing to the laws of logic, the reality of the world, and certain current philosophical ideas, they (evidentialists) have sought to show 1) (the stronger version) that the existence of God is logically necessary, or 2) (the weaker version) that it is relatively probable that God exists, or that the arguments for his non-existence are not compelling..." Milne, Know the Truth, pg. 52-53

2. This view historically led to the development of the "rational proof" of God's existence.

a. Ontological argument

b. Cosmological

c. Teleological

d. Moral

e. Historical

3. The position of the *presuppositionalist*. "The Christian's task is to confront the non-Christian with the God of whom he is already aware, *not* to consider his (sinful) presupposition that God does not exist. Fallen men and women can attain a true knowledge of God only through being born again by the Holy Spirit in response to the gospel." Ibid., pg. 57.

## III. THE INCOMPREHENSABILITY OF GOD

A. Defined: The term "incomprehensible" comes directly from the Latin *incomprehensibilis*. This term has a dual meaning. On the one hand, it refers to that which is not able to be contained... It describes the immensity of God. God is so great that the universe cannot contain him (1 Kings 8:27). The second meaning of the Latin word refers to understanding, or the epistemological idea... Generally speaking, the term "incomprehensible" is used by theologians to refer to the last meaning, namely, not able to understand exhaustively. It should be observed that this is not a term suggesting that God is unknowable. It rather suggests that there is a limit to our knowledge." Smith, Systematic Theology, pg. 100.

B. Affirmed:

1. Ps 145:3 *“Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.”*

2. Ps 147:5 *“Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.”*

3. Ps 139:6 *“{Such} knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is {too} high, I cannot attain to it.”*

4. Rom 11:33-36 *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him {be} the glory forever. Amen.”*

5. 1 Cor 2:10-11 *“For to us God revealed {them} through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the {thoughts} of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the {thoughts} of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”*

#### IV. THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

A. Asserted: “The Christian faith has always maintained that God is knowable and known by man. This is basic to any religion having to do with God. If he does not exist, or if he exists, but is unknowable to man, then there can be no such thing as religion, since by definition religion has to do with man’s relations with God.” Smith, Systematic Theology, pg. 97.

B. Basis for belief in knowability:

1. God is represented in Scripture as revealing Himself:

a. Matt 11:27 *“All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal {Him}.”*

2. Confirmed by the image of God in man (Gen. 1:26).

a. Col 3:10 *“... and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”*

3. Man's knowledge of God is directly affirmed in Scripture.

a. By the unbeliever (Innate) - Rom. 1:19-21.

b. By the believer (Acquired) - John 17:3 "*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*"

Jer. 9:23-24 "*Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.*"

c. By the believer (Increasing) - Col. 1:10 "... *so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please {Him} in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

C. Purpose of our knowledge of God:

1. "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. 'This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent' (John 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God (Jer. 9:23ff.). What, of all states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself. 'I desire ... the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,' says God (Hos. 6:6). J.I. Packer, Knowing God, pg. 29

2. "What is God? Those, therefore, who, in considering this question, propose to inquire what the essence of God is, only delude us with frigid speculations, - it being much more our interest to know what kind of being God is, and what things are agreeable to his nature. For, of what use is it to join Epicures in acknowledging some God who has cast off the care of the world, and only delights himself in ease? What avails it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? The effect of our knowledge rather ought to be, first, to teach us reverence and fear; and, secondly, to induce us, under its guidance and teaching, to ask every good thing from him, and, when it is received, ascribe it to him. For how can the idea of God enter your mind without instantly giving rise to the thought, that since you are his workmanship, you are bound, by the very law of creation, to submit to his authority? - that your life is due to him? - that whatever you do ought to have reference to him? If so, it undoubtedly follows that your life is sadly corrupted, if it is not framed in obedience to him, since his will ought to be the law of our lives. On the other hand, your idea of his nature is not clear

unless you acknowledge him to be the origin and fountain of all goodness. Hence would arise both confidence in him, and a desire of cleaving to him, did not the depravity of the human mind lead it away from the proper course of investigation.

For, first of all, the pious mind does not devise for itself any kind of God, but looks alone to the one true God; nor does it feign for him any character it pleases, but is contented to have him in the character in which he manifests himself always guarding, with the utmost diligences against transgressing his will, and wandering, with daring presumptions from the right path. He by whom God is thus known perceiving how he governs all things, confides in him as his guardian and protector, and casts himself entirely upon his faithfulness, - perceiving him to be the source of every blessing, if he is in any strait or feels any want, he instantly recurs to his protection and trusts to his aid, - persuaded that he is good and merciful, he reclines upon him with sure confidence, and doubts not that, in the divine clemency, a remedy will be provided for his every time of need, - acknowledging him as his Father and his Lords he considers himself bound to have respect to his authority in all things, to reverence his majesty aim at the advancement of his glory, and obey his commands, - regarding him as a just judge, armed with severity to punish crimes, he keeps the judgement-seat always in his view. Standing in awe of it, he curbs himself, and fears to provoke his anger. Nevertheless, he is not so terrified by an apprehension of judgement as to wish he could withdraw himself, even if the means of escape lay before him; nays he embraces him not less as the avenger of wickedness than as the rewarder of the righteous; because he perceives that it equally appertains to his glory to store up punishment for the one, and eternal life for the other. Besides, it is not the mere fear of punishment that restrains him from sin. Loving and revering God as his father, honouring and obeying him as his master, although there were no hell, he would revolt at the very idea of offending him.” John Calvin, Institutes Bk. I, Chap. 2, pg. 39-40.