

Lesson 4: 2LCF Chapter 2: Of God and of the Holy Trinity Paragraphs 1-2

*"But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King.
At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation."*

Jeremiah 10:10

Each paragraph in this chapter deals with an important facet of the doctrine of God. It has been rightly pointed out that paragraphs 1-3 teach the following:

- 1) The Attributes of God
- 2) The Relations of God to his Creatures
- 3) The Tri-unity of God

In this fourth lesson on the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith we will consider paragraphs 1-2: the attributes of God and the relations of the God.

As we come to this study of the doctrine of God, we must enter in with a sense of profound humility and reverence. I am reminded of Psalm 50:21, where the Lord rebukes His people with these stunning words: "you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you..."

Whenever we enter into a study of God's Word, we must come with a sense of trepidation and contrition, but how much more when we come to study and make assertions with respect to the character and nature of the living and true God.

Sam Waldron aptly describes the difficulty of the task when it comes to studying the doctrine of God:

Nothing is more challenging in all of theology than theology proper—or, the doctrine of God. Here we come, as finite beings, face-to-face with the Infinite. What could be more intellectually challenging? In no other area of theology are we forced to grapple so continually with the Infinite. In the doctrines of the word, man, or church we are at least dealing with matters that are related to humanity, but in this, it is the infinite God about whom we attempt to speak and confess our faith. The doctrine of God above all is a call to a deep sense of our intellectual and spiritual insufficiency. As we study this chapter, our souls should humbly cry out again and again, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:16). Certainly the only safe course is to stay very close to the Word of God.³⁶

James Renihan adds his own caution:

Our fathers understood that any contemplation of God must be done with reverence and all. Our Lord is not a laboratory specimen to be dissected and examined. We cannot treat him in this way. Rather, He is a glorious God who has revealed himself to us in his own manner. We received from Him everything He has made known, remembering that we will never be able

³⁶ Sam Waldron, "Chapter Two: Of God and of the Holy Trinity," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 62-63.

to contemplate Him as He truly is. Our knowledge of God will only ever be according to his revelation of Himself.³⁷

This means that in our study of the doctrine of God, we must recognize the kind of theological enterprise that we are engaged in. Contrary to the opinions of some, we cannot know God exhaustively. When we enter into the study of God, we must not think that we can possess an “archetypal theology”—an exhaustive and infinite knowledge of God that is known only to Himself.

But, this must not dissuade us in our study, for we can attain to a level of understanding that has been called “ectypal theology”—a finite knowledge that is a true theology, but that is partial in nature.³⁸

This is because God has condescended to reveal aspects of His infinite nature to His finite creatures through accommodated language.

James Montgomery Boice comments on Calvin’s mention of this divine accommodation: “John Calvin, the great reformer and theologian, speaks of God’s revelation of himself to us in the Bible as baby talk... What Calvin means by this is that any communication to us by God must be in the simplest and most rudimentary language from God’s point of view.”

Herman Bavinck stated: “The Bible is anthropomorphic through and through.”

The word *anthropomorphism* is made up of two Greek words, “*anthropos*”, meaning “man,” and “*morphe*”, meaning “form.” Thus, God reveals himself to man in language that man can understand—in “man-form.”

As we have already seen in our study of 2LCF1, God has revealed Himself to us in the book of nature and in the book of Scripture, and in divinely accommodated language.

This should encourage us to study diligently, that we might know God in truth. Yet, it should also humble us as we reckon with the fact that, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so his ways higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).

³⁷ James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, Baptist Symbolics 2 (Cape Coral: Founders Press, 2022), 80.

³⁸ Ibid.

Paragraph 1.

The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and withal most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

1 Cor. 8:4,6; Deut. 6:4; Jer. 10:10; Isa. 48:12; Exod. 3:14; John 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; Deut. 4:15,16; Mal. 3:6; 1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23; Psalms 90:2; Gen. 17:1; Isa. 6:3; Psalms 115:3; Isa. 46:10; Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36; Exod. 34:6,7; Heb. 11:6; Neh. 9:32,33; Psalms 5:5,6; Exod. 34:7; Nahum 1:2,3

Exposition

Paragraph 1 provides a summary of many of the attributes of God without distinguishing those that are communicable from those which are incommunicable.

Communicable attributes: Those attributes which God communicates/shares.

Incommunicable attributes: Those attributes which God wills not to communicate/share.

As the confession begins here in chapter two, it presents us with a view of God that its in accord with classical Christian theism. Waldron writes: "In these paragraphs there is a wonderful and balanced presentation of the character or attributes of God. The religion of our day needs more of contemplating God and living with the conscious reality that this is the God with whom we have to do."³⁹

Waldron parses this paragraph by noting that it outlines the following attributes (among others):

- **Singularity:** The Lord our God is but one only living and true God;
- **Aseity:** whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection;
- **Incomprehensibility:** whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself;
- **Simplicity:** a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto;
- **Infinity:** who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute;
- **Sovereignty:** working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory;
- **Love:** most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;
- **Justice:** the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

In the paragraphs that follow, we will look at some of these attributes in greater detail and consider the implications for us as God's creatures.

³⁹ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2016), 66.

Singularity

The Lord our God is but one only living and true God

This speaks to the reality of God's oneness. He cannot be likened to the Hindu Pantheon—as one god among many. Rather he is solitary in his glory, power, and perfections. As King of kings and Lord of lords, he is set apart in a category all his own.

This is explicitly taught in the Old and New Testaments:

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

1 Corinthians 8:4 ... there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and ... there is no God but one.

With respect to application, Waldron writes: "The singularity of God is practically valuable in manifold respects. It means that the one God is to be worshipped only, and that He is to be loved supremely. Furthermore, it means that in constructing the doctrine of the Trinity, this oneness of God must not be compromised... the singularity of God practically controls our daily living, religious worshiping, and our doctrinal thinking."⁴⁰

Aseity

whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection

This attribute of aseity, uses a latin expression to convey the self-existence of God apart from any external factors. The latin phrase "a se" can be simply literally translated as "from Himself" and conveys that God is absolutely independent and self-sufficient.

The word "subsistence" is used twice in chapter 2. This is not a common word that we use today, so it may be helpful to define. It has been defined as, "The property by which an entity is capable of existing *per se*, in itself, or in its own right."⁴¹

This does mean that he is self-created, but as his personal name "Yahweh" (Exodus 3:14) suggests, He simply is.

Isaiah 48:12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last."

Acts 17:24-25 "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Cornelius Van Til summarizes: "God is in no sense correlative to or dependent upon anything beside his own being... God is *absolute*."

⁴⁰ Sam Waldron, "Chapter Two: Of God and of the Holy Trinity," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 65.

⁴¹ Dolf te Velde, ed., *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae/ Synopsis of a Purer Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1:613.

Incomprehensibility

whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself

We have already considered this in some detail. Though we can have a “personal, true, accurate, and comforting” knowledge of God, we cannot know God exhaustively, nor can we fathom the depths of the divine mystery.⁴² The finite cannot exhaust the infinite

Job 11:7-8 *Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?*

Job 26:14 *Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; And how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?*

Psalm 145:3 *Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable.*

Simplicity

a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto

John Frame helpfully defines divine simplicity in this way: “To say that God is simple, in scholastic philosophy, is to say that there is no composition in his being.”⁴³ God is not composed of parts, but He is single, indivisible, and unified in His being.

Waldron points out that that God’s attributes are “all descriptions of the simple essence of God.”⁴⁴ He adds that this doctrine is clearly seen in several of the following statements:

God is Spirit (John 4:24)

God is light (1 John 1:5)

God is love (1 John 4:8, 16)

He writes: “Thus we learn that the attributes of God are ways of describing the essence of God...”⁴⁵

Infinity (Transcendence)

who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute

Waldron comments:

Infinity means God transcends (goes beyond) us in space (*immense*), time (*eternal*), knowledge (*incomprehensible, most wise*), will (*most free*), power (*almighty*), and in every other way (*immutable, most holy, most absolute*).

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

⁴² Sam Waldron, “Chapter Two: Of God and of the Holy Trinity,” in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 66.

⁴³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002), 225.

⁴⁴ Waldron, 68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

1 Kings 8:27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You

Jeremiah 23:23-24 "Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.

Psalms 90:2-4 Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God...For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night.

Sovereignty

working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory

It has been pointed out that the confession speaks to the extent, rule, and goal of God's sovereignty.

1) Its Extent: all things

2) Its Rule: the counsel of his ... will

3) Its Goal: for his own glory.

Psalms 115:3 "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases."

Ephesians 1:11 "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will..."

Justice

the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

Hebrews 11:6 ...he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Nahum 1:2-3 A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

Exodus 34:7 yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished

Paragraph 2.

God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself, is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creature which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, and He hath most sovereign dominion over all creatures, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever Himself pleases; in His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent or uncertain; He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands; to Him is due from angels and men, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, as creatures they owe unto the Creator, and whatever He is further pleased to require of them.

John 5:26; Psalms 148:13; Psalms 119:68; Job 22:2,3; Rom. 11:34-36; Dan. 4:25,34,35; Heb. 4:13; Ezek. 11:5; Acts 15:18; Psalms 145:17; Rev. 5:12-14

Exposition

This paragraph has been divided into the five following sections.⁴⁶ We will not look at each in detail, but simply recognize these sections and consider our responses as God's creatures.

- 1) His Sufficient Independence from Them
- 2) His Sovereign Dominion Over Them
- 3) His Absolute Knowledge of them
- 4) His Utter Sanctity Before Them
- 5) His Intrinsic Claims upon Them

⁴⁶ Ibid., 74-75.