

Doctrine of God
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I. Introduction to the Doctrine of God

A. Definition of Theology Proper

--the pattern in the history of theology has been from a focus on a theocentric study of God to an anthropocentric study of faith and experience.

B. Importance of the Doctrine of God

--it is the foundation and framework for all systematic theology as well as pastoral care and worship

C. God in North American Popular Culture

--"Homer the Heretic" portrays God as one of us, just a bit more powerful.

D. Knowledge of God

1. Acquisition – incomprehensible; we cannot fully know God. We know him = we begin to know his revealed self. True knowledge comes from divine revelation and our response to it. Special revelation helps us see general revelation well again.

2. Definition – (Piper) to know how we stand in relation to God; (Packer) knowledge about God as it is applied; (Bierma) to know = a form of intimacy

II. The Being of God

A. Names of God

--can mean one of two things:

a. the totality of God himself

b. God's name = YHWH

--significance of names in scripture:

a. reveals something about the person; reveals God to us and also how he relates to us.

B. Attributes of God

1. Introduction

2. Open Theism (God does not know the future, but rather reacts to us)

a. Strengths

i. emphasis on personal side of God

ii. helps provide a corrective for our own theology

iii. helps to clarify our doctrine

b. Weaknesses

i. is portraying God as not knowing all things really less problematic?

ii. unfair portrayal of classical theism being hard and cold with respect to God's relationship to us.

C. The Trinity

1. Definition – comes out of the Jewish tradition “the Lord our God is one”

--modalistic monarchianism = one God, three masks

--dynamic monarchianism = son is creature but above all other creatures

--God is one “homo ousia” one substance in 3 hypostases (subsistences, persons)

--we think of “persons” as distinct separate individuals and we tend to read this back into early discussions.

--should see it as relations, paternity, filiation, and procession

--economic trinity: Father/Creator, Son/Mediator, Spirit/Finisher

2. Biblical Basis – no proof text, but rather combination of many texts; need four kinds of texts for trinity: those showing God as one, those showing the three as distinct persons, those showing the three as linked together, and those showing each as God. Jesus’ baptism shows all three in action in some sense.

3. Creeds and Confessions

--Apostles’ Creed says very little about the HS; confesses the Trinity before explaining it.

--Nicene Creed affirms the deity of the Son

--Athanasian Creed contains the full doctrine of the Trinity

4. Unitarian Challenge

--Pedagogical: God is great teacher, wants to teach the human minds, not confuse them.

--Theological: Trinity subverts the unity of God

--Biblical: No single passage supports the Trinity

--Historical: No historical discussions of the Trinity in early church times

--Practical/Devotional: Divides your devotion, takes away from God

5. Analogies – Plantinga’s “Social Theory” of the Trinity: each is God only with the other 2, cannot be God without the others, but none will break off and become independent; each belongs to the other two. –see his paper--

6. Application

III. The Works of God

A. The Divine Decree(s) – Reformed theology stresses the sovereignty of God; he has sovereignly determined from all eternity whatsoever will come to pass and works his sovereign will in his entire creation according to his pre-determined plan. God has a large scale will for all the world, but also a small scale will for each one of us; has both secret and revealed will, our responsibility is to follow the revealed will

--Petitionary prayer: why do it? It is a means which God has brought into being to accomplish his purpose. God often will connect certain means with certain ends – our responsibility is not to figure out God’s ends, it is to do the “means”.

B. Creation

--God created to make his glory extant and manifest (Berkhof); it's fitting for God to create; the Trinity is divine hospitality and creation is the enlarging of that circle to us.

1. Material World – theories of how God created

a. Gap Theory: gap between Gen 1:1 and 1:2, which is where the dinosaurs and such are

b. Day-Age Theory: long day creation

c. Mature Creationism: how old was Adam at creation?

d. Flood Geology: age attributed to effects of flood

--concordistic approach attempts to bring perceived conflicts into harmony, but the problem is with us not with revelation. Bierma says the point is not how long the days were, but rather that God did it.

2. Spiritual World

a. Good Angels

--created, limited (not omniscient or omni-present), holy, individualistic (not organically related), spirits.

--similar to humans in that some are fallen and some are elect – but they are not objects of God's grace; humans were made a little lower than the angels, but will some day be exalted above them; angels are not created in God's image.

--Functions: Praise/Worship God, Encourage humans to obedience, communicate divine messages to humans, exercise divine providence to humans, administer divine justice to humans

b. Fallen Angels

--don't know when created, so don't know when they fell; possibly the sin which caused their fall is the same as which Satan used to tempt Eve; 2nd fall of Satan in Luke 10:18 (Satan falling like lightning)

C. Providence

1. In General – literal meaning, before sight, or to see beforehand; elements of providence are creation, preservation, and government. HC emphasizes preservation (upholding) and government (ruling).

--Preservation: God upholds, maintains, sustains everything he has made; he continues his covenant faithfulness

--Government: God is controlling all things for his purposes

2. Suffering: ultimately, God is the author of suffering. Difficult to explain how exactly this makes sense, but God has ultimate control and uses all suffering for good. Variety of ways that he does this. Bierma explains concurrence (God's action + human action) in this basic way: Regeneration is all God's act, conversion is cooperation/compatibilist action, and fall is molinist, where humans are responsible but God sees/knows the options that could happen and uses them.

--see Belgic Confession Arts. 12-13, LD 10