

—A Study of the Westminster Confession of Faith— *The Westminster Doctrine of God and of the Holy Trinity, WCF 2*

*After confessing that God has graciously revealed Himself to us, we next confess the *contents* of this revelation as to the person of God Himself. And it's worth noting that there's no direct allusion in this Chapter to the scholastic proofs for God's existence and attributes. Instead, the Confession confesses God's existence based on God's self-revelation and not on rational argumentation. This results in a Chapter which lets Scripture speak for itself—a notable characteristic of the entire Confession.

*The three sections of this Chapter treats of God: as regards His attributes, as regards His independence, and as regards His tri-unity.

I. Of God as Regards His Attributes and Absolute Independence From All His Creation §§ 1-2

A. God is one

1. Here we affirm the oneness or unity of God. To say that God is *one* does not mean that there is only one divine person (cf. paragraph 3), but rather that the divine being is numerically one in nature or essence. God is one being, *one indivisible essence*. This unity of the divine essence is affirmed in opposition to the polytheism of heathen nations and the heresies of the Tritheists and the Manicheans or Dualists.
2. This doctrine of God's oneness is firmly established upon divine revelation:
 - a) Ex 20.2-5; Dt 4.35; 6.4; 32.39; Isa 43.10; Mk 12.29, 32; 1Cor 8.4; 1Tim 2.5; Js 2.19

B. God is the alone living and true God

1. Though the name of god is given to various other beings in Scripture, on account of some resemblance they bear to God, yet, He alone is the living and true God, Jer 10.10; 1Th 1.9
 - a) Angels are called gods on account of the excellence of their natures, Ps 82.1
 - b) Magistrates are called gods because they act in God's name, Ex 22.28; Ps 82.2-7
 - c) Moses was god to Pharaoh because he received divine messages from God for Pharaoh, Ex 4.16; 7.1
 - d) Idols are called gods because idolaters account them to be so, Gen 31.32; Jer 2.28; Ps 97.9
 - e) Satan is called the god of this world because he holds fallen man captive, 2Cor 4.4
2. But God is declared to be the *living* God in opposition to all idols, which are destitute of life (Ps 115.3-7); and the *true* God in opposition to all others accounted as god, which are not really so.
 - a) Between the living and true God and all rival gods, there is an infinite disparity.

C. God is a most pure spirit without body parts or vacillating passions

1. God is an incorporeal, immaterial, invisible, and immortal Being, Jn 1.18; 1Tim 1.17; 6.16
 - a) To affirm that God is spirit (Jn 4.24) is not to say that He is without personality, for He possesses intelligence, will, and affections, all which are constitutional of personality.
 - (1) Having made man a person in His image (Gen 1.26-27), it's impossible that God could be without personality. Rather, the creation of man as person necessitates that personality and personhood find their infinite perfection in Him, from which man's personhood is derived.
 - b) Therefore, to affirm that God is spirit is to affirm, in part, that He possess in infinite perfection all those properties that belong to our spirits (cf. below), but without the limitations and essential marks of our sinfulness and humanness.
2. As pure spirit, God is without body parts, Dt 4.15-16; Lk 24.39; Heb 12.9; 1Tim 1.17; Acts 17.29
 - a) That body parts and the actions done by body parts are ascribed to God in Scripture is obvious; but such language is used in accommodation to our capacities of understanding, and not as a literal description of God. If God were to speak of His infinite essence and perfection as He is in Himself, instead of being better informed, we would be utterly confounded, Job 11.7-9; 26.14.

- b) God therefore lisps to us, using baby-talk, as it were, employing human properties and actions as emblems of His own spiritual perfections and acts. These ascriptions are called anthropomorphisms in Scripture and are God's gracious condescensions to our weakness.
 - (1) **Shaw:** We become acquainted with persons and things by seeing them or hearing of them; and to intimate the perfect knowledge which God has of His creatures, eyes and ears are ascribed to Him. It is chiefly by our hands that we exert our bodily strength; and hands are ascribed to God to denote His irresistible power. We look with an air of complacency and satisfaction on those whom we love; and God's face denotes the manifestation of His favor.
- 3. As pure, perfect, spirit, God is also without passions or impassible (unable to be acted upon)
 - a) Being infinite in perfection, God is not subject to the sudden change which passions such as anger, fury, jealousy, and compassion, bring upon a person.
 - (1) A man is moved to various passions by the influence or change of things either outside of him or in his own heart. These passions then give way to a change in his direction or purpose or pursuit or behavior.
 - (2) But being absolutely perfect, God cannot be affected unto change by something outside of Him. He knows the end from the beginning, has decreed the end, along with all the means unto it, and cannot possibly change one iota from it, Mal 3.6; Js 1.17; Acts 14.15.
 - (a) This does not mean, however, that God is like a still photo in which there is no movement. There is most definitely movement, or the exercise of His character; but the difference is, the reason for all of His movements originate from within Himself and not from anything outside of Him.
 - (3) What do we make, then, of human passions being ascribed to God in Scripture? Passions are ascribed to God in the same way as body parts, as a condescension to our weakness to understand His works.
 - (a) **Shaw** (quoting Burnet on the Thirty-Nine Articles, Article 1): Passion produces a vehemence of action; so when there is, in the providences of God, such a vehemence as, according to the manner of men, would import a passion, then that passion is ascribed to God. When He punishes men for sin, He is said to be angry; when He does that by severe and redoubled strokes, He is said to be full of fury and revenge; when He punishes idolatry, or any dishonor done to Himself, He is said to be jealous; when [we witness a change in] the course of His proceedings, He is said to repent; when His dispensations of providence are very gentle, and His judgments come slowly from Him, He is said to have [compassion]. And thus all the varieties of providence come to be expressed by all that variety of passions which, among men, might give occasion to such a variety of proceeding.
 - b) **Ferguson,** When we speak therefore of God's impassibility we mean that in all of God's existence and in all of the exercise of His character, no exercise is the consequence of His being acted upon by external forces, but is *always* the consequence of His self-conscious giving of Himself in His character in relationship to Himself within the Trinity and beyond Himself in connection with the created order.
 - (1) God's passions, then, like wrath or love, are not attributes in themselves, but rather the exercise of an essential attribute of God in a specific context or certain circumstance. If the circumstance changes, then so does the exercise of God's character, Ezk 18.26-28.
- D. God possesses all possible perfections
 - 1. The perfections of God are called His attributes or properties because they are ascribed to Him as the essential properties of His nature. He possess them all in absolute and infinite perfection, without limitation or defect.
 - 2. God's attributes are most commonly distinguished between incommunicable and communicable, with the incommunicable being those attributes to which there is nothing analogous in the

creature, and the communicable being those attributes to which the human spirit bears some faint, though imperfect analogy. Cf. the division evident in WSC Q. 4.

3. **Berkhof**, Scripture does not exalt one attribute of God at the expense of others, but represents them as existing in perfect harmony in the Divine Being. It may be true that now one, and then another attribute is expressed, but Scripture clearly intends to give due emphasis to every one of them. The Being of God is characterized by a depth, a fullness, a variety, and a glory far beyond our comprehension, and the Bible represents it as a glorious harmonious whole, without any inherent contradictions. And this fullness of life finds expression in no other way than in the perfections of God.
4. Therefore we affirm the *simplicity* of God's being. He is not made up of many parts, but is essentially simple in His being. In contrast, man is compounded, being composed of body and spirit while God is simple, being a most pure spirit.
 - a) This means that God and His attributes are one. His attributes cannot be considered as so many parts that enter into the composition of God, for God is not, like men, composed of different parts. Neither can they be regarded as something added, or even attributed, to the Being of God, because God is absolutely perfect and can admit of neither subtraction or addition of any sort. Rather, they are the manner in which God reveals His Being to us.
 - b) We should guard against separating the divine essence and the divine attributes, and also against a false conception in which they stand to each other (i.e., that God is His attributes, and the attributes are indistinguishable from each other and from God Himself). The attributes are real determinations of the Divine Being, real qualities that inhere in the Being of God.
 - c) *In a sense*, they are identical to God in that it can be said that God's attributes are real qualities in God. We can even say with **Shedd**, that the whole essence is in each attribute and the attribute in the essence. And it can be said that knowledge of the attribute is knowledge of the divine essence, because neither has ever existed or can exist without the other.
 - d) In sum, the attributes of God are essential qualities of God by which He reveals His very essence to us.

E. God's Attributes

1. God is infinite, i.e., unbounded or limitless in His being, and exists under none of the limitations of time or space, Rom 11.33. From this results God's incomprehensibility, Job 11.7
 - a) When this perfection is applied to other attributes of God, it denotes their absolute perfection. E.g., He is infinite in His wisdom, His holiness, &c.
 - b) Applied to *space*, this perfection makes God omnipresent; applied to *knowledge*, it makes Him omniscient; applied to *power*, it makes Him omnipotent; applied to *time*, it makes Him eternal.
 - c) This perfection requires that God's being be immense as well as omnipresent. *Immense*, because He necessarily extends beyond all creation, and *omnipresent*, because He is necessarily present everywhere in His creation. He thus fills all places at once with His essential indivisible presence, Jer 23.23-24.
 - (1) He cannot be divided between places, because He is essentially one. He must therefore be entirely and simultaneously present, in the totality of His being, every moment of time in every point of space.
 - (2) Yet, God is free to manifest His presence as He pleases in every time and place. To the saints in heaven He will manifest His presence in favor and immeasurable love forever; while to the wicked in hell He will manifest His presence in hatred, rage, and wrath for all eternity. On the mount of transfiguration, He manifested Himself to Christ with absolute delight, but on the cross He manifested Himself to Christ in absolute wrath.
2. God is self-existent and independent, Jn 5.26

- a) God exist of none but *Himself* (Latin: *a se*, from Himself; thus we speak of God's *aseity* or absolute independence from all things)
- b) He has all life, glory, and blessedness, in and of Himself. His existence is necessary and underived, Ex 3.14
 - (1) His glory necessarily consists in the absolute perfection of His nature.
 - (2) His blessedness is all summed up in the possession and enjoyment of His own infinite excellencies.
 - (3) He is therefore self-sufficient and needs no one and owes no one anything. Every other being receives its all from Him, but He receives no advantage from any, Job 22.2-3; Acts 17.24-25; Rom 11.36; Rev 4.11. Before He created, God did not need creation to sustain His life, increase His glory, or add to His blessedness. It was according to the counsel of His own will that He made anything, for He had no need of it.
 - (4) Therefore God doesn't so much derive glory from what happens in the created order as He manifests his glory in and to creation.
- 3. God is the fountain of all being, Acts 17.28
 - a) As God has all life in Himself, so He is the author of that life which is in every living creature, Gen 1.1; 2.7; Rom 11.36
 - b) It follows from this that God has absolute sovereignty over all His creatures, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever He pleases, Ps 115.3; 135.6; Dan 4.25, 35; 1Tim 6.15
 - (1) He who is the first cause of all things must be the last end of all things, and therefore all things exist for His glory to do His will, Ps 103.19
 - c) It also follows that God has an indisputable claim upon His creatures' service and obedience.
 - (1) Nothing is its own, but all belongs "body and soul" to the Lord, the giver of life. Therefore they are all bound to serve Him with their all.
 - (2) The redeemed are therefore bound to the Lord by a double tie: creation, Gen 2.7, 15-17; and redemption, 1Cor 6.19-20
 - (3) To God is therefore due, from angels and men, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, He is pleased to require of them.
- 4. God is eternal, Ps 102.25-27
 - a) The Lord is without beginning, Ps 90.2; without end, Ps 9.7; and without succession, 2Pet 3.8
 - b) **Shaw**, Being eternal, God could have had no beginning and can have no end. And in the existence of His person, there can be no succession of thoughts, feelings, or purposes. There can be no increase to His knowledge, no change as to His purpose. The past and future must be as immediately and as immutably present with Him as the present. His existence is therefore an ever-abiding, all-embracing present, which is always contemporaneous with the ever-flowing times of His creatures. His knowledge which never can change, eternally recognizes His creature and their actions in their several places in time; and His actions upon His creatures pass from Him at the precise moments predetermined in His unchanging purpose.
- 5. God is immutable or unchangeable; His being and nature are constant, Js 1.17; Heb 13.5
 - a) God's immutability necessarily results from His absolute perfection. If He were to change, it would have to be either for the better or the worse. He cannot change for the better, as that would imply imperfection; and He cannot change for the worse, as He would cease to be perfect. He must therefore remain invariably the same, Num 23.19; Ps 33.11; Mal 3.6
 - b) God is therefore unchangeable in His being, Ex 3.14; unchangeable in His glory, Ps 24.7; unchangeable in His blessedness, Prov 8.30; unchangeable in His purposes, Isa 46.10-11; Eph 1.11; unchangeable in His covenant, love, and promises, Ps 89.34-35; Isa 54.10.
 - c) Therefore when we read in Scripture of the Lord *repenting*, we're to understand that it refers to an alteration in the outward dispensations of His providence, to a change *in* His plan, but not a change *of* His plan. For God does not change His plan, but He plans His changes; and to communicate these changes to us, He speaks of it as repenting, which means a change of

direction. But we are by no means to attribute to Him a change of mind or purpose, because it remains impossible for Him to change, Job 23.13.

6. God is all-knowing or omniscient

a) In God's sight all things are open and manifest, Heb 4.13. He alone knows Himself perfectly. He knows all things beside Himself, whether past, present, or future. He knows all His creatures perfectly, all their actions, all their thoughts, all their words, and all their intentions, Prov 15.3; Ps 139.2-4; Acts 15.18.

b) He therefore even knows the most contingent events: the actions of free agents were always known with certainty to Him; so that though they be contingent in their own nature or uncertain as to us, yet, in reality, nothing is to Him uncertain or contingent.

(1) The difficulty of understanding how God's knowledge relates to the free actions of men has led many to either deny God's foreknowledge or deny man's freedom or to make God's foreknowledge dependent upon man's free actions.

(a) Scripture clearly teaches God's foreknowledge of contingent events, 1Sam 23.10-13; 2Kgs 13.19; Ps 81.14-15; Isa 42.9; 48.18; Jer 2.2-3; 38.17-20; Ezk 3.6; Matt 11.21. Moreover, Scripture leaves us in no doubt as to the freedom of man. It does not permit the denial of either of these realities and therefore the difficulty cannot be solved by doing so. Rather, we must live with the difficulty, resting in the truth of both, according to Scripture, and in the goodness, righteousness, and wisdom of God, who cannot err in His government of men, Gen 18.25

(b) But in approaching a solution we must understand that God does indeed have perfect foreknowledge of contingent events, because those very events, along with all their causes and circumstances are all decreed by God to come to pass. In other words He has perfect foreknowledge of all contingent events because He decreed both them and their means. God's foreknowledge, then, is rooted, not in the actions themselves, but in His decree, which grounds those actions.

(c) Man therefore remains entirely free to act as he chooses, but this freedom is not arbitrariness; it is rather reasonable self-determination. In other words, man always and only acts according to his nature. God knows this nature comprehensively and therefore knows exactly what men will do in any and all situations. He therefore decreed the circumstances by which men would freely and responsibly act, according to His good and holy will.

c) God's knowledge is a different kind of knowledge than ours.

(1) Though we may know the same things, He knows it completely, exhaustively, immediately, whereas we know it in part, by reasoning, and mediately.

(2) Moreover, the way that God possesses that knowledge is different from the way we possess that knowledge. God's knowledge of all things is not by information, nor by reasoning and deduction, nor by a succession of ideas, He knows all things eternally, by one direct, all-comprehensive intuition; and He knows them comprehensively and infallibly, because His knowledge is completely independent of the created order.

(a) **Hodge**, Our knowledge is dependent, God's is independent. Ours is fragmentary, God's is total and complete. Ours is in great measure transient, God's is permanent.

(3) Being independent of the thing itself, His knowledge of it is logically prior to the thing that exists whereas our knowledge is logically subsequent to the thing that exists.

(a) **Hodge**, In knowing the resources of His power, He knows all things possible. In knowing the immutable purposes of His will, He knows all that has existed or that will exist, because of that purpose.

d) The wisdom of God is that perfection of His nature by which He directs all things to their proper end, the end for which He gave them being, viz., His own glory, Ps 104.24.

(1) Wisdom presupposes infinite knowledge and is the perfect practical use which the perfect intelligence and will of God makes of His knowledge, Dan 2.20; Rom 16.27

- (2) God exercises His wisdom both in the choice of ends and in the choice of the means to infallibly and gloriously accomplish those ends. Whether in creation, government, or redemption, the wisdom of God has ever been on display in the ordering and effecting of His glorious will.
7. God is most free and absolute, working all things after the counsel of His own will, Eph 1.11
- a) God's will is absolutely free, Dan 4.35, Ps 115.3, and He works in all things to bring about His glory, Pr 16.4; Rom 11.36. Indeed, the manifestation of His own glory is His chief end.
 - b) Moreover, God is the sole supporter, proprietor, and sovereign disposer of all His creatures.
 - (1) **Hodge**, This sovereignty rests not in His will abstractly, but in His adorable person. Hence it is infinitely wise, righteous, benevolent, and powerful sovereignty, unlimited by anything outside of His own perfections.
 - (2) Is it any wonder that all worship, service, and obedience are due to Him from all His creatures? And how can such a life lived for such a God be anything but fulfilling, happy, and blessed?
8. God is omnipotent
- a) The power of God is that infinite efficiency whereby He is able to effect whatsoever He wills, without any limitation whatsoever, except that which implies a contradiction, either to His own perfection or to the nature of things themselves.
 - (1) Our power is limited but God's power effects absolutely and unconditionally all that He intends, Mk 10.27. We work through means, but God acts without means as He pleases. Moreover, when He chooses to use means, even the means receive their efficiency from His power, and not His power from the means, Ex 7.20; Ezk 36.37
 - b) The power of God is unlimited and almighty, and yet because it is a property essential to His nature, He cannot act in power against His nature. E.g., He cannot lie or act unwisely, because His nature is necessarily true and wise; and He cannot deny Himself, seek a higher end than Himself, sleep, suffer, or cease to exist.
 - (1) These are not, however, imperfections in His power, but rather arise from the absolute perfection of His nature.
 - c) God's omnipotence is illustrated in His acts, but never exhausted. There ever remains an infinite reserve of possibility behind every act of God—He could always do more, if He wills.
 - d) The power of God was exercised mightily in creation, Ps 33.6, 9, and continues to be exercised in its preservation, upholding, and directing, Ps 104.27-30; cf. Rom 1.20
 - (1) The most eminent display of God's power was in the work of redemption by Christ, and it is also displayed in His mighty works of regeneration, sanctification, and resurrection.
9. God is perfectly good, Ps 119.68
- a) God's goodness is particularly called His glory, Ex 33.18, 19; 34.6, and is expressed by different names, depending on the object towards which it is directed.
 - (1) When it relieves the miserable, it is called *mercy*, Ps 51.1
 - (2) When it confers favor on the undeserving or ill-deserving, it is called *grace*, Mt 11.26
 - (3) When it supplies the wants of the needy, it is called *bounty*, Ps 103.1-5
 - (4) When it forbears to execute the punishment due to rebels, it is called *patience* or long-suffering, 2Pet 3.9
 - (5) When it redeems sinners and brings them into eternal favor by and with His Son, this is so incomparable a work that it can be called by no other name than *love*, 1Jn 4.9-10, 19
 - (a) **Berkhof**, The love of God may be defined as that perfection of God by which He is eternally moved to self-communication.
 - (b) This love is exercised towards all men in some sense, Jn 3.16; Mt 5.44-45; but it is especially exercised towards believers to whom He communicates Himself in the fullest and richest sense, with all the fulness of His grace and mercy, Jn 16.27; Rom 5.8; 1Jn 3.1

- b) The goodness of God is therefore a very comprehensive term, including all the forms of His kindness towards men, whether considered as creatures, sinners, or saints. But it may be described generally as that property which disposes Him to communicate happiness to His creatures.
 - (1) And yet, rather than being motivated by His creatures' happiness as an end, He is ever motivated by His own glory and regulated in the exercise of it by His wisdom in the accomplishment of that supreme end.
10. God is absolutely true
- a) The truth of God is that perfection of His Being by virtue of which He fully answers to the idea of the Godhead, is perfectly reliable in His revelation, and sees things as they really are.
 - (1) Thus, God is truth in a *metaphysical* sense in that in Him the idea of the Godhead is perfectly realized. He is all that He as God should be, and as such is distinguished from all so-called gods, which are called vanity and lies, Ps 115.4-8; Isa 44.9-10
 - (2) God is truth in an *ethical* sense in that He reveals Himself as He really is so that His revelation is absolutely reliable, Num 23.19; Rom 3.4; Heb 6.18
 - (3) God is truth in a *logical* sense in that He knows things as they really are. The truth of God is therefore the foundation of all human knowledge, for no fact in all the created universe is a brute, uninterpreted fact. Rather, every fact is God's fact, created by Him, interpreted by Him, and can only be rightly understood from His revelation of it.
 - b) It is because of this perfection that He is the source of all truth, Isa 65.16; Jer 10.8, 10, 11; Jn 14.6; 17.3; Tit 1.2; 1Jn 5.20-21.
 - (1) **Hodge**, God's veracity guarantees the validity of the information of our senses, the truth of the intuitions of reason and conscience, the correctness of the inferences of the understanding, and the general credibility of human testimony, and preeminently the reliability of every word of the inspired Scriptures.
 - c) An important aspect of God's veracity is His *faithfulness* by virtue of which He is ever mindful of His covenant and fulfills all the promises which He made to His people.
 - (1) This faithfulness is of the utmost practical significance to His people. It is the ground of their confidence, the foundation of their hope, and the cause of their rejoicing. It saves them from the despair to which their own unfaithfulness might easily lead, gives them courage to carry on in spite of their failures, and fills their hearts with joyful anticipations, even when they are deeply conscious of the fact that they have forfeited all the blessings of God, Num 23.19; Dt 7.9; 32.4; Ps 25.10; 31.6; 89.33; Isa 49.7; 1Cor 1.9; 2Tim 2.13; Heb 6.17-18; 10.23
11. God is infinitely just and righteous
- a) The justice of God is that perfection of His nature according to which He is infinitely righteous in Himself and just and equal in all His proceedings with regard to His creatures, Dt 32.4. The former is His absolute righteousness and the latter is His relative righteousness.
 - (1) God is just to Himself by acting in all things agreeably to His nature and perfections, and by maintaining His own rights and prerogatives.
 - (a) We cannot speak of a law above God to which He adheres and thereby proves Himself to be righteous; but there is a law in the very nature of God, and it is the highest standard by which all other laws are judged. In this sense God is righteous, acting in all things agreeably to His nature, Ps 119.137; Jn 17.25; 1Jn 2.29
 - (2) God is just towards His creatures as He maintains Himself over against every violation of His holiness, and shows in every respect that He is the Holy One.
 - (a) This righteousness is more properly called His *justice* as it especially manifests itself in giving every man his due and treating him according to his deserts, Lam 1.18; Dan 9.14; 2Cor 5.10; Rev 16.5
 - (3) **Hodge**, God is most willingly just, but His justice is no more an optional product of His will than is His self-existent being. It is an immutable principle of His divine

constitution, Hab 1.13. Thus, God does not make His demands just by willing them, but He wills them because they are just.

- b) Distinctions can be applied to the justice of God.
 - (1) His *legislative* justice is His giving righteous laws to His creatures, suited to their abilities, Rom 7.12
 - (2) His *distributive* justice is His rendering to every one his due, according to the law, without respect of persons, 2Chr 19.7; Eph 6.9
 - (a) His *remunerative* justice, whereby God rewards the sincere, though imperfect obedience of those who are accepted in His sight as righteous, through the righteousness of Christ imputed to them and received by faith, Ps 58.11; Heb 6.10. But this reward is entirely of free grace, and not of debt, 2Tim 4.8
 - (b) His *retributive* justice, sometimes called vindictory, avenging, or punitive justice, whereby He renders the sinner the punishment due his crimes, Dt 29.18-21; Heb 10.26-31.
 - i) This exercise of justice became indispensably *necessary* upon the entrance of sin into the world. God must inflict the punishment due to sin, either upon the transgressor or upon his surety. This necessity stands upon the holiness of God, whereby He must demonstrate His aversion to sin, and upon the truth of God, whereby He must fulfill the threats of His Law.
 - ii) This exercise of justice is confirmed by the testimony of all men's conscience, Rom 1.32; 2.15-16, but especially from His executing punishment upon His own Son as the Surety of sinners, Zech 13.7. Truly, of all places, it is at the cross that it is seen that God can by no means clear the guilty or allow sin to pass with impunity.
 - iii) **Hodge**, God hates sin because it is intrinsically hateful, and He punishes sin because such punishment is intrinsically righteous.

12. God is infinitely holy

- a) The holiness of God can be thought of in two ways. First, it denotes the fact that He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. In this sense the holiness of God is His central and supreme perfection and is not a moral designation, but a majestic one, and denotes a majesty-holiness, Ex 15.11; 1Sam 2.2
- b) Secondly, it denotes an ethical separation from moral evil or sin. He can have no communion with sin, Job 34.10; Hab 1.13. In this sense holiness points to God's majestic purity, or ethical majesty, and is both negative, separation from sin, and positive, moral excellence and ethical perfection, Isa 6.3.
 - (1) This ethical holiness may be defined as that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in His moral creatures.
- c) Holiness is the lustre and glory of all the divine perfections and is therefore the song of the angels, Isa 6.3, and the perfection by which the Lord swears His faithfulness, Ps 89.35.
- d) The holiness of God manifests itself in the creation of man as holy, in the expulsion of rebel angels from heaven, sinful man from paradise, the destruction of a sinful world, the overthrow of Sodom, &c., as well as in the moral law implanted on man's heart and speaking through man's conscience and God's Word; but most of all in the crushing of a sin-laden Son on the cross, Isa 53.10.

II. Of God as Regards His Tri-Unity § 3

- A. The previous paragraphs described God's perfections and His independence from the world and the world's dependence upon Him. In this final paragraph we read about God's unity and tri-unity.

- B. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each equally the one God, and the indivisible divine essence and all the divine perfections and prerogatives belong to each in the same sense and degree, WSC 5-6. There is therefore in God but one intelligence, one will, and one purpose.
1. The deity of Christ can be established upon the following truths:
 - a) His preexistence, Jn 1.1-3; 8.58; 3.13; 16.28
 - b) All the names and titles of God are applied to Him, Jer 23.6; Isa 9.6; Jn 1.1; Heb 1.8; Rev 1.8
 - c) All the divine attributes are predicated of Him, Jn 8.58; 17.5; Rev 1.8; 22.13; Heb 1.10-11; Mt 28.20; Mt 11.27; Jn 2.24-25; Rev 2.23; Jn 5.17; Heb 1.3
 - d) The Scriptures attribute all divine works to Christ, Jn 1.3-10; Col 1.16-17; Heb 1.3; Col 1.17; Mt 28.18; Jn 5.28; Jn 16.7; Eph 5.25-27
 - e) The Scriptures declare that worship should be paid to Him, Heb 1.6; Rev 1.5-6; 1Cor 1.2; Jn 5.23
 2. The deity of the Holy Spirit can be established upon the following truths:
 - a) He is called God, Isa 6.8-9 cp. Acts 28.25-26; Jer 31.33 cp. Heb 10.15-16; Acts 5.3-4
 - b) Divine perfections are ascribed to Him, 1Cor 2.10-11; Ps 139.7; Rom 8.11
 - c) Divine works are attributed to Him, Job 26.13; Ps 104.30; 1Cor 12.9-11; Jn 3.6; Tit 3.5
- C. The titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not the names of the same person in different relations (Modalism or Sabellianism), but of different persons in the Godhead. The mode of subsistence of the three persons in the one indivisible essence or substance must ever remain a mystery to us; but as it is a matter of revelation in the Scriptures, we believe it, praise it, and confess it, Ps 33.6; Isa 61.1; Mt 3.16-17; 28.19; Jn 15.26; 2Cor 13.14
1. **Shaw**, We do not confess that three are one in the same sense and in the same respect in which they are three; that would be a contradiction in terms. But we confess that they are three in one respect and one in another respect—three in person, one in essence, and there is no absurdity in that at all. It surpasses our reason, indeed...but if it be a doctrine clearly revealed in the Sacred Scripture, we are bound to believe it, however incapable we may be of comprehending it.
 2. **Shaw** (quoting **John Dick** *Lectures on Theology*), We believe there is a distinction in the Godhead, to which there is nothing similar in creatures...and we use the word “person” to express that distinction. It may be objectionable, because, being applied to other beings, it is apt to suggest an idea which is inconsistent with the unity of God; but this is the unavoidable consequence of the imperfection of human language; and we endeavor to guard against that abuse by declaring that, in this application, it must be qualified so as to exclude a separate existence. When we say that there are three persons in the Godhead, the word “person” signifies a distinction which we do not pretend to explain, but which does not intrench upon the unity of essence.
 3. The persons are so distinguished that they usually speak of each other as I, You, and He, Jn 14.16; Jn 17.5; Jn 14.16; 15.26
 4. The persons mutually love each other, act upon and through each other, and take counsel together.
 - a) The Father sends the Son, Jn 17.3; and the Father and Son send the Spirit, Ps 104.30.
 - b) The Father gives commandment to the Son, Jn 10.18; and the Spirit speaks of Christ, Jn 16.13-15
 5. The persons have eternally related to each other according to their revelation to us as Father, Son, and Spirit. They have never been in relation to each other in any other way than the manner in which they are.
 6. The persons work in perfectly harmonious economy in all their actions.
 - a) The Father creates and sits supreme in the general administration of all things, including the electing of a people to redeem from sin
 - b) The Son becomes incarnate, and as the God-Man discharges the mediatorial functions of prophet, priest, and king, for the redemption of the elect

- c) The Spirit applies the redeeming work of the Son to the souls and bodies of His members.
 - d) The Father is the absolute origin and source of life and law; the Son is the revealer; and the Spirit is the executor.
- D. The divine attributes are the properties of the divine essence and therefore belong in common to each of the divine persons. However, the properties of each person are those peculiar modes of personal subsistence and that peculiar order of operation, which distinguish them from each other and which determine the relation of each to the others.
1. This is primarily expressed by the different names of the persons. Father expresses the peculiar property of the first person, Son expresses that of the second person, and Spirit that of the third.
 2. Spirit cannot express the third person's peculiar essence because it is also the essence of the Father and the Son. It must rather express the eternal relation which He bears to the Father and the Son.
 3. The Father sends and operates through the Son and Spirit and the Son sends and operates through the Spirit—never the reverse. The Son is sent by, acts for, and reveals the Father. The Spirit is sent by, acts for, and reveals both the Father and the Son. Thus they illumine each other and never themselves, because they do not exist alone but as a tri-unity. They cannot be given to self-promotion because of the love they have for each other and because of the relationship that they eternally enjoy with each other.
 4. It is because they are one, that when we behold the glory of the Son we find ourselves beholding the glory of the Father, whom He reveals to us, Jn 1.14, 18.
 5. The three persons are one God, identical in essence and divine perfections, equal in honor, power, and glory.
 6. **Dick**, Without the knowledge of this doctrine it is impossible to understand the grandest work of God—redemption—in which the three persons act distinct and conspicuous parts. We are called to contemplate the love of the Father, the condescension of the Son, and the gracious operations of the Spirit. Redemption is not the work of a solitary agent, but of three, all concurring in the salvation of our perishing race. Hence we owe gratitude to each of the persons of the Godhead distinctly, and are bound to give to each the glory to which He is entitled. We are baptized in their name, and consecrated to their service; and our prayers are addressed not to God absolutely considered, but to the Father, through the Son, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. It appears, therefore, that the Christian system of duty is founded upon this doctrine, and that without the belief of it there can be no acceptable religion. So far is it from being useless, that it is the very foundation of practical piety.

Bibliography:

An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Robert Shaw
 The Confession of Faith, A. A. Hodge
 Confessing the Faith, Chad Van Dixhoorn
 Westminster Standards class at WTS, Sinclair Ferguson
 Systematic Theology, Louis Berkhof

Assignments:

*Read the chapter in Hodge entitled “Of God and Of the Holy Trinity”—the questions at the end of the chapter should be used as a review, to make sure you understand the contents of the chapter.
 *Read Chapter II in the WCF, paying close attention to the Scripture proofs
 *Memorize Shorter Catechism questions 4-6
 *Memorize Jn 4.24; Job 26.14; Ps 90.2; Mal 3.6; Deut 6.4; Mt 28.19; Mk 1.9-11; 1Cor 8.6; Heb 1.2; Jn 1.2-3; Gen 1.2; Eph 1.4, 7, 13
 —The next class will meet, DV, at 8AM on 10 January