

General principles:

1. We cannot allow antinomy into our theological system.
2. If we don't propound God from the Scriptures, we form an idolatrous image of God. A correct perception of God must be derived from Scripture. See: Romans 1:18-32.
3. God may be described by his attributes. To take away any of his attributes is to diminish his divinity. Divine attributes are not characteristics that are distinct and separate from his essence. God cannot set aside an attribute like one would remove a garment. For example, in the incarnation, the Son does not lose any of his attributes as God. He remains truly God as well as being truly man. For a good exposition of this point, see Calvin's *Institutes*. . . 2,13,4.

The WSC defines God as a Spirit and then gives three adjectives which define Spirit: infinite, eternal and unchangeable. The seven nouns which follow each relate to the three adjectives.

The nouns don't distinguish us from God; the adjectives do. The adjectives point to how God's attributes are incommunicable.

All of these descriptions together equal God's glory. The glory of God, therefore, can be defined as the weight of the godness of God.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q4 What is God?

A - God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

TRANSCENDENT ADJECTIVES	CONDESCENDENT NOUNS	SUMMARY REFERENT
Spirit	being	
infinite	wisdom	
eternal	power	
unchangeable	holiness	Glory
	justice	
	goodness	
	truth	

GOD IS SPIRIT

John 4:24

Jesus is teaching that:

1. God is personal or self-conscious and self-determining. He is living and active. The fact that the Bible ascribes to God wisdom, knowledge, a will, and goodness also shows that he is personal.

Robert Reymond writes, "The God of the Bible is anything but inert impersonalness: he is the living and active Creator and Architect of the universe, beneficent Provider of the creature's needs, Advocate of the poor and oppressed, Freedom-fighter, just Judge, empathetic Counselor, suffering Servant, and Triumphant Deliverer.

Concerning this, God is tripersonal (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8; John 14:23). **John Calvin writes**, "God . . . designates himself by another special mark to distinguish himself more precisely from idols. For he so proclaims the sole God as to offer himself [at the same time] to be contemplated in three persons. Unless we grasp these, only the bare and empty name of God fits about in our brain to the exclusion of the true God" (*Institutes*, 1, 13, 2).

Therefore, the tripersonality of God is not an idea that can simply be added to an already complete view of God. The trinity is essential to the concept of God and the being of God cannot be properly conceived without the idea of him being tripersonal.

Robert Reymond writes, ". . . since the only God who is there, is, in point of fact, a Trinity, if we think and talk about God and attributes as if he were simply an undifferentiated divine Monad we are, as a matter of fact, thinking of a God that has no existence" (*What Is God?*, 32).

Gregory of Naziansus (c. 329 - c. 389) writes, "I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one" ("On Holy Baptism," Oration xl.41; *Patrologia Graeca*, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857-66), 36, 418.

This is why Judaism and Islam, while monotheistic, are idolatrous faiths. The god of both religions is not the true

and living God. Their gods are idols because they are not triune. See Calvin's point above.

2. God's spiritual nature means that he is noncorporeal.
See: Luke 24:36-43.

When the Bible uses anthropomorphisms it is to better assist people to understand that God is truly personal (Exo. 33:20 - face; Prov. 15:3 - eyes; Isa. 37:17 - ear; Exo. 6:6 - arm; Exo. 3:20 - a right hand; Nahum 1:3 - feet).

This means that no property of matter may be ascribed to God. He has no extension in space, no weight, no mass, no parts, no form. He is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). God is not restricted to spatial locations. Remember the statement in John 4:24 comes in the context of Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well concerning the proper place to worship God (John 4:20). Jesus said that the worship of God does not require that one be present in either place (John 4:21).

This also means that we should not think of God in terms of material size or dimensions, even infinite ones. It is not a part of God who is every place in the universe, but all of God who is every place (Psa. 139:7-10). No place in the universe can surround or contain him (1 Kings 8:27).

God is not like atomic or cosmic energy or vapor, steam, or air, all of which are created things.

The idea of God being one in essence and without parts means that he is indivisible (what historical theology has sometimes called his "simplicity").

We can in no way picture his non-material being. All that we can know of God is what he has revealed to us in the biblical revelation. See: Matt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:11.

An example of this is found in Ezek. 1:25-28. The descriptive words reflect God's incomprehensibility. Ezekiel uses various similes to describe what he saw. It is important to note that he did not see God himself. He only saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."

This spiritual nature underlies the second commandment (see: Exo. 20:4-6; Deut. 4:15-16). To make any image of God is to demean him since any image is another god. God is jealous to protect his glory. He will not share it with anyone or anything

else (Isa. 42:8). To properly worship God, we must worship him as he is: tri-personal, noncorporeal spirit.

Robert Reymond writes, "The Roman Catholic Church lives daily with a prime example of a violation of the Second Commandment in its highly acclaimed Sistine Chapel in the Vatican and delights to display it, for there in the chapel ceiling Michelangelo has painted God the Father as a bearded, white-haired elderly man reaching out with his outstretched hand and finger to touch Adam in order to give life. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel may display great art, but it also exhibits great disobedience to the Law of God. The result of this and every other similar effort is to fashion an image that is a distortion of God and is thus blasphemous and idolatrous" (*What Is God?*, 40).

J. C. Ryle writes, "Romanism in perfection is a gigantic system of Church-worship, Sacrament-worship, and priest-worship, - . . . it is, in one word, a huge organized idolatry." From: *Warnings To Churches* (Reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 158.

A second application is that we can know God through saving faith in Jesus Christ for he who knows the Son knows the Father (John 14:7) and he who has seen Christ with the eyes of faith has seen the Father (John 14:9). Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

The fact that God is Spirit emphasizes a series of important theological points:

- 1) Why we are to resist every attempt to fashion an image of God's Being either with our hands or with our minds;
- 2) Why the world, beginning with itself, cannot know or find God through its own wisdom (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:14). God's revelation of himself redemptively and incarnationally in Christ and propositionally in his Word is the only way man can ever know anything about God. It is also important to maintain that the inscripturated Word must never be separated from the incarnate Word.
- 3) Why it is that no one can see God and only the Son can make him known (John 1:18).
- 4) Why it is that no one knows the Father comprehensively except the Son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him (Matt. 11:27). We must come to the Son as the revealer of the Father

(Matt. 11:28) and in that knowledge receive eternal life (John 17:3).

5) Why Christ alone is the only Mediator between God and man and the only way of salvation (1 Tim. 2:5; John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

6) Why it is that only the person who has the Son, the only exegete of God the Father, has life, and why the person who does not have the Son does not have life (1 John 5:12).
(These points are adapted from *What Is God?* by Robert Reymond, 42-43)

INFINITE IN HIS BEING

The idea contained in the concept that God is infinite in his being is that God is omnipresent. This means that God is everywhere; all things are immediately in his presence. His presence is inescapable. Donald Macleod uses this language: Everywhere there is God - his Being, his self-revelation, his sovereignty, his activities, his prerogatives, his scrutiny (*Behold Your God*, 65).

Scriptures dealing with the omnipresence of God:
Psalm 139:7-12; Prov. 15:3; Psalm 34:15; Acts 7:48-49;
Jer. 23:23-24; Isa. 66:1; Ezek. 8:12; Amos 9:2-4; 1 Kings 8:27;
Acts 17:27-28

While God is in every place, he is not confined to those places. No matter how expansive the universe may be, it cannot confine God. Consider 1 Kings 8:27.

Important cautions concerning this doctrine:

1) This doctrine should not be used to identify God with creation as in pantheism. Nor should it be used, as do panentheistic process theologians such as Charles Hartshorne and John B. Cobb, Jr. as to identify God with some impersonal, evolutionary force in that world that is itself undergoing self-development and growth with the world being set forth as his "body."

God's personalness and his work of creation "in the beginning" preclude such concepts. The creator/creature distinction is an important guard against all pantheistic and panentheistic constructions.

Omnipresence does not mean that God is the totality of all being. God is always separate and distinct in essence from his creation.

While God is immanent and active in all things, he is also the one uncreated Being who stands ontologically over against the created universe and is essentially distinct from it. Therefore, the doctrine of God's transcendence protects the creature/Creator distinction.

2) This doctrine precludes taking literally the biblical descriptions of God's "ascendings" and "descendings," his "comings" and "goings." Since God is omnipresent, he does not literally come or go to specific places. When that language is used in Scripture (Gen. 11:5; Isa. 64:1-2), it is metaphorical language depicting a special manifestation of God's working presence either in judgment or grace. Therefore, anthropomorphic expressions of God's coming and going are simply speaking of manifestations of his power.

This principle applies to all three persons of the trinity and, therefore, includes the incarnation and the Holy Spirit's "coming" into the world at Pentecost.

After the incarnation, God, the Son still possessed the attribute of omnipresence. Divine attributes are not characteristics of God that are separate and distinct in nature from his essence that he can lay aside like a person taking off a piece of clothing. We do not hold to a kenotic Christology in which the Son divested himself of divine attributes in the incarnation. If that were the case, then the Jesus would not have been truly God as well as truly man. The incarnation is viewed as an event of addition, not subtraction. Without divesting himself of any of his divine attributes, God, the Son took into union with himself a human nature. The Chalcedon definition states that Jesus possessed "two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinctiveness of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the properties of each nature being preserved."

John Calvin wrote in the Institutes, 2, 13, 4:

Another absurdity . . . namely, that if the Word of God became incarnate, [he] must have been confined within the narrow prison of an earthly body, is sheer impudence! For even if the Word in his immeasurable

essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be born in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, to hang upon the cross, yet he continually filled the earth even as he had done from the beginning.

The Heidelberg Catechism Question 48 states: "Since [Christ's] Godhood is illimitable and omnipresent, it must follow that it is beyond the bounds of the human nature it has assumed, and yet none the less is in this human nature and remains personally united to it."

Similarly, the Holy Spirit did not come into the world on the day of Pentecost in the sense that he was not already present or that he was absent in the Old Testament. Rather his presence was uniquely manifested in the upper room at Pentecost. see the following passages for the indwelling and presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament: Numbers 27:18; Psalms 51:11; Isa. 63:10-11; Hag. 2:5

Some theologians use the term omnipresent interchangeably with immensity. This word should be avoided because it implies size and, therefore, contains the idea of being partly here and partly there. God is not partly with us and partly with our distant friends. God is everywhere in personal being; not spatially extended. Distance, space, extension, or, occupation of space are not applicable to God.

Four applications of this doctrine:

1) Our knowledge of God's personal and immediate presence with us should be an encouragement in times of trouble. In times of difficult duties, poverty, affliction, sickness, pain, persecution, and death we know that God is with us. Psalm 46:1 God is always a God who is near and not far away from us. He knows our condition, having ordained it, and is working out his perfect plan for our ultimate good (Rom. 8:28-29).

2) This is an encouragement for our prayer life. When we pray to an omnipresent God, we do not need to shout to be heard by him. He is nearer to us than the breath we breathe. He hears every whisper, he knows our thoughts and the longings of our hearts before we verbalize them. If the one we are praying for is on the other side of the earth, we know that God is equally

present with them. He can give protection, care, and provide for their needs because he is present with them.

3) The knowledge of God's personal and immediate presence with us should be a restraint on our sin. From sexual immorality to theft or whatever so-called secret sin we may have, we are doing it in the immediate presence of God. This ought to influence us in how we live, think, and what we say.

4) While this means that we do not have to go to a particular geographic location to worship, we cannot permit this doctrine to supersede God's command that we should not forsake the assembling together of ourselves (Heb. 10:25).

ETERNAL IN HIS BEING

The idea of God's eternity is the concept that God has always existed and has the power of being in and of himself.

God knows no limitation with respect to temporal duration in either direction of eternity - time past and future. He has always existed in the past, exists now in the present, and will always exist in the future. He never began to be, he knows no growth or age, nor will he ever cease to be.

This means that God is an uncaused being. Because of our cultural background, it is difficult for us to conceive of an uncaused eternal being. We are used to studying finite objects and relationships in their causal connections.

Scriptures that teach God's eternity:

Psalm 29:10; 45:6-7; 90:1-2; 102:25-27; Deut. 33:27; Isa. 40:28; 44:6; 57:15; Jer. 10:10; John 1:1-3 (idea of "already continually" based on Greek imperfect *en* that occurs four times in 1:1-2); Eph. 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 1:8-12; 7:25; 13:8; Rev. 1:8,11; 21:6; 22:13

A common misunderstanding of this doctrine is the assertion that God lives outside of time and that God's eternity means that he is totally disconnected from finite events in time.

For example, some theologians, following Augustine and later Aquinas, have said that for God there is neither past, nor future, they are equal with him. It is argued that God does not have a consciousness of successive duration with respect to his own existence.

This freezes God in some kind of static eternal wasteland of the now and denies God even what I know - an understanding of the passage of time. It is important to affirm that God is not ontologically affected by sequential duration, but he does know the difference between before and after.

If sequential time is not a reality with God then much of Scripture is rendered meaningless. Consider these passages concerning "before and after" concepts: Joshua 24:5; Psalm 90:2; Jer. 1:5; 12:15; John 17:24; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Eph. 1:4-5, 11; 1 Tim. 1:9. The *pro's* ("before") are not describing man's temporal perspective, but God's revealed activity prior to the creation of the world.

Robert Reymond writes,

. . . it is a *non sequitur* to conclude from the fact of God's omniscience that God has no *idea of succession*, that is, that relative to his own existence he has no knowledge of a past, present, and future applicable to his own existence. This is to confuse the notion of the *succession of ideas*, which is surely *not* true of God if one means by this notion that God learns new facts, with the notion of the *idea of succession* which I submit God surely has (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 173-174).

The Bible speaks in terms of God's foreknowledge. If there is no future for God in terms of temporal time, then the term foreknowledge is meaningless. God speaks in past tense - "I created;" and future tense, "I will send my Son."

J. Oliver Buswell says it this way: "If the future is not future for God as well as man, then the message of the epistle to the Ephesians is a silly dream. 'Unconditional election'? 'Chosen in Him *before* the foundation of the world?' 'Predestined?' For a timeless God there is no before and no after.

The God of Paul and Calvin has a 'purpose' and 'worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will.' 'He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.' In the economy of the fullness of time He will head up all things in Christ.

Of course, 'the decree of God' is totally simultaneous and eternal *as decree*, but we are talking about world history, the *execution* of His decrees.

If the past is not past for God as well as for man, then we are yet in our sins; Christ has not come and never will come,

for he is Deity and therefore timeless. But He is said to have come 'in the fullness of time' and 'in due time.' If the past is not past for God, we are yet under the wrath and curse of a righteous Judge" (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 1:47).

Robert Reymond writes, ". . . the ascription to God of the attribute of 'timeless' eternity understood as the absence of a divine consciousness of successive duration with respect to his own existence should not be maintained. It is inconsistent and cannot be supported from Scripture. It is, at best, a philosophical inference and, I think, a fallacious one at that. And it implies that I know something - the idea of succession with respect to my own existence - that God does not know" (*What Is God?*, 83).

It is also important to be careful how the idea of time as an aspect of God's eternity is applied. If "time" is understood as an objective succession of moments existing independently and apart from all minds, it would suggest that something independent of God is moving history forward. This questions God's sovereignty over time and history. However, if J. Oliver Buswell's definition of time as the "mere abstract possibility of the before and after relationship in sequence" there is not a problem (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 1:47).

This means that time is defined as the idea in a knowing mind of the before and after relationship in durational sequence. Therefore, time eternally resides in the mind of God and descriptive of the relationship between his thoughts and creative actions. It would also include his knowledge of the durational relationship between any one of his acts and a second divine act (See Reymond, *What Is God?*, 83-84).

However, it is important not to suggest that God is coming to knowledge via durational sequence.

Robert Reymond summarizes this:

This would mean that, for God, while he himself ever remains *ontologically* unaffected by durational sequence, and while his thoughts themselves are *eternally* intuited, comprehensive, and teleologically ordered and *not* arrived at chronologically through the discursive process, nevertheless, the concepts of 'before' and 'after' in durational succession are distinct *epistemological* categories as applicable to him as they are to us. This would mean that

- he knows that his thoughts on the one hand and his actions on the other are related to each other in the 'before' and 'after' relationship,
- he knows that his 'this-world' actions stand related to each other in a temporal durational sequencing, and
- he knows the creature's past, present, and future respectively as past, present, and future" (*What Is God?*, 84).

UNCHANGABLE IN HIS BEING

The immutability of God affirms that God does not change. He is constant in his being and in all of his attributes. He does not come to knowledge or understanding since he already possesses perfect knowledge, neither does he change his purposes or divine decrees in regards to his providential control of all things.

Louis Berkhof says it this way: "The immutability of God. . . is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises. In virtue of this attribute He is exalted above all becoming, and is free from all accession or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same. Even reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, since a change is either for better or for worse. But in God, as the absolute Perfection, improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible" (*Systematic Theology* p. 58).

Scriptures that affirm this attribute of God:

Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Psa. 33:11; 102:26-28 (Heb. 1:11-12); Prov. 19:21; Isa. 14:24; 46:9-10; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 1:23; 2 Tim. 2:3; Heb. 6:17-18; 12:28; 13:7-9; James 1:17.

These verses demonstrate the constancy of his being, character, and purpose. This means that God always remains the one and same true God, faithful to himself, his decrees, and his works (Reymond, *Systematic*, 178).

Three questions involved with this doctrine are:

1. Does God's immutability mean that there is no movement in God? In other words, does this mean that God is immobile?

Scripture certainly presents God actively involved in the affairs of man. There is change around him and change in the

relations of men with God, but there is no change in his attributes, attitudes, motives of action, or his promises.

Louis Berkhof writes:

The divine immutability should not be understood as implying *immobility*, as if there were no movement in God. . . . The Bible teaches us that God enters into manifold relations with man and, as it were, lives their lives with them. There is change round about Him, change in the relations of men to Him, but there is no change in his being, His attributes, His purpose, His motives of action, or His promises" (*Systematic Theology*, 59).

2. Since God does not change his mind, what do the Scriptures that present God as "repenting" mean?

See: Exo. 32:9-14; Jonah 3:10; Amos 7:3-6

Those who hold that God changes his mind - in other words, comes to better knowledge or understanding and then acts in accordance with new knowledge and wisdom deny the immutability of God as well as the omniscience and wisdom of God.

When the Bible speaks of God changing or repenting it is primarily an anthropopathism - the attributing of human emotions or actions to God to help explain a situation.

In terms of Exo. 32:9-14, God intended to teach that he always relates himself to man in terms of salvation through a mediator. Moses appealed to God's covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exo. 32:13).

In Exo. 32:30-32, Moses made atonement for the people and again stood as a mediator between God and the people. Therefore, he became, by divine design, a type of Christ's mediatorial work.

For example, what happened in Jonah? God sent Jonah to Nineveh to call the people to repentance. If he had planned to destroy Nineveh no matter what, why would he send Jonah? Why would he give them forty days to repent? They met the conditions set forth by Jonah and God spared them which was obviously his intention all along (Jonah 3:10 - 4:2)

See also: Jer. 18:7-10; Psalm 18:25-27.

These Scriptures set forth the principle that God always acts the same way toward moral good and evil. The things he loved or hated at the time of Abraham are the same things today.

Robert Reymond writes:

In every relationship He has with mankind, the immutable moral fixity of his character is and will be evident. And because this is so self-evidently true, as he himself declared, God did not deem it necessary when he inspired the Scriptures to attach every promise he made or to ever prediction of judgment he issued the corresponding conditions for weal or woe. His stated principle of conduct is always operative, and if the biblical interpreter does not realize this he may conclude wrongly that God has broken a promise or failed to carry out a predicted judgment when in reality he is acting according to his declared principle of conduct (*What Is God?*, 104-105).

3. A third question that arises from the immutability of God is whether or not our prayers change the mind, attitude, or purpose and plan of God.

In response to this, it is important to remember that God works through means, but he does not change his eternal purposes. Our prayers serve as a means in the eternal plan of God, but do not alter that plan.

See: Daniel 9:1-4.

God acts through secondary agents. See: 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1. These two passages are supplementary. **J. Oliver Buswell writes:** "God acts in what he permits. Whatever evil god permits, He permits for His own good purposes. Just as in the case of Joseph's brethren, Joseph was able to say(Gen. 50:20), so we are to understand that whatever evil God permits even Satan to bring about is a part of His disciplinary providence" (*Systematic Theology*, 51).

Application:

1. God is consistent in every aspect of his being and in his dealings with us. Therefore, God can be trusted. A god who can change can never be trusted. What it says is true today, may not be true tomorrow.

Robert Reymond makes this application:

Was God all-wise when he laid the foundations of the earth, when he spoke and the mountains and seas appeared? The Bible says he was. Then because he is immutable he is precisely the same all-wise God today in his dealings with you and will remain so forever. He is not less skillful. Neither has he become mentally senile nor does he have less knowledge now.

Was he mighty when he spoke this world into existence out of nonexistence? The Bible says he was. Then because he is immutable he is precisely the same mighty God today in his dealings with you and will remain so forever. The arm of his strength has not palsied in the slightest; he is the same infinite Colossus of might today, And the strength of his power has not been sapped in the slightest degree.

Was he just and holy in the past when he destroyed the antediluvian world by the Genesis flood, when he rained fire and brimstone from heaven on Sodom and Gommorrah, when he poured out his destructive plagues on Egypt? The Bible says he was. Then because he is immutable he is precisely the same just and holy God today in his dealings with you and will remain so forever. What he hated when he sent the flood he still hates and what he loved then he still loves. What he hated when he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah he still hates and what he loved then he still loves.

Was he truthful in the past when he bound himself by covenant oath to save his elect? The Bible says he was. Then because he is immutable he is precisely the same truthful God today in his dealings with you and will remain so forever. He veracity is immutable; his Word is "forever settled in the heavens" (Ps. 119:89).

Was he good and kind, generous and gentle, benevolent and plenteous in mercy and pity, full of steadfast lovingkindness, and forgiving in the past when again and again and again he forgave backsliding Israel for its sins? The Bible says he was. Then because he is immutable he is precisely the same good, kind, generous, gentle, benevolent, forgiving God today in his dealings with you, plenteous in mercy, full of lovingkindness, and will remain so forever. . . . his mercies will never cease to be, for they too are everlasting (Ps. 100:5).

Did he have a plan of redemption before the creation of the world that included you and me? The Bible says he did. Then because he is immutable he has precisely the same plan of redemption today that involves us and he will forever. You and I are still beneficiaries of it. Not one of its stipulations will he ever alter. Did he make us any promises in that plan? The Bible says he did. Then those promises are still binding upon him today and shall be binding upon him forever, for by "two immutable things" - his eternal purpose and his binding covenant oath - he has confirmed and sealed his Word. His promises are not "Yes and No," affirms Paul. They are "Yes," and the gospel declares the "Amen!" (2 Cor. 1:19). In sum, bring before me any attribute of God you choose and I will write on it *semper idem*- "always the same." And you, my brothers and sisters, knowing and trusting this one living and true God who is "always the same", can sing with complete confidence: "Great is thy faithfulness," O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not; As thou has been thou forever wilt be. Reymond, *What Is God?*, 107-109.

2. The permanency of our salvation rests in God's immutability.

Peter thought that it resided in his courage and ability to persevere (Matt. 26:33-35; Luke 22:31-33). The permanency of our salvation does not rest in us, but in God immutable promise and keeping of us (Mal. 3:6; 2 Tim. 2:13). See: *Westminster Confession* Chapt. 17.2. The permanency of our faith resides in God's immutable faithfulness and the immutability of his decree of election (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-14).

Robert Reymond writes,

If one child of God could ever eventually perish, then God would not be immutable, and we might well all perish. Then no gospel promise would be certainly true. God's word would be untrustworthy, and nothing in it would be worthy of our acceptance. But because God is unchangingly faithful to us, we know that he loves us and will love us forever (*What Is God?*, 111).

3. This means that God's promises of heaven for believers and hell for unbelievers will surely take place.

Robert Reymond writes,

. . . God has immutability declared that he will save only those who trust the saving work of his Son and will consign to perdition those who do not trust the saving work of his Son. So let the unbelieving moralist be as good, as moral, as honest, as upright as he can be, he will still be condemned. For God's declaration will forever stand: "He only who trusts my Son will be saved; he who does not trust my Son is condemned already and shall be damned forever" (see John 3:18). This declaration is an unchangeable as God himself. After ten thousand years of conscious torment in hell the moralist will still read this divine edict in burning letters above him:

He only who trusts my Son will be saved; he who does not trust my Son is condemned already and shall be damned forever.

After ten billion ages of anguish in hell have rolled away the man who looked to his own morality in this life for his salvation will still see it emblazoned over the "great chasm that has been fixed".
 . . .:

He only who trusts my Son will be saved; he who does not trust my Son is condemned already and shall be damned forever.

And when the tormented moralist - perhaps ever hoping in the words of Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, that "at last - far off - at last . . . winter [will] change to Spring" - thinks that the wheel of eternity must surely have spun out its last thread after it seems that the ages of ages have past, after it seems that every particle of what we call eternity must surely have run out, he will still see written in flaming letters burning as brightly as they ever did these words:

He only who trust my Son will be saved; he who does not trust my Son is condemned already band shall be damned forever.

No, dear friends, I get no pleasure in saying it but say it I must: the words of Dante's *Inferno* do

indeed apply here to the impenitent and unbelieving:
 "Leave every hope, ye who enter here."
 From: *What Is God?*, 114-115.

INFINITE, ETERNAL, UNCHANGEABLE IN HIS WISDOM

The fact that God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his wisdom refers primarily to the omniscience of God. The statement that God is infinite in his wisdom designates that he knows all things; eternal in his wisdom designates that God's omniscience has always existed as part of his being; unchangeable in his wisdom designates that God's wisdom is perfect and, therefore, cannot be added to or diminished - what he knows, that is everything without exception, he know completely and immutably from eternity to eternity.

The omniscience of God simply means that he knows all things. This knowledge is innate and immediate in that it does not come as a result of observation or from a process of reasoning. It is also simultaneous and not successive, so that God sees things at once in their totality. Furthermore, it is complete. Man's knowledge is always partial, but God's knowledge is unlimited.

When we think of the wisdom of God in regards to his knowledge, we can differentiate between the two by perceiving his wisdom as a particular aspect of his knowledge. H. B. Smith defines the wisdom of God in particular as "that attribute of God whereby He produces the best possible results with the best possible means."

Louis Berkhof defines God's wisdom as "that perfection of God whereby he applies his knowledge to the attainment of his ends in a way which glorifies him most" (*Systematic Theology*, 69).

Robert Reymond writes,

. . . the all-wise God is at every moment cognizant of everything that ever was, now is, or ever shall be. And it has never been otherwise. He necessarily knows himself exhaustively, and he necessarily knows his creation exhaustively - and both instantaneously, simultaneously, and everlastingly. His knowledge of himself and of all other things is absolutely comprehensive and eternally "intuited," that is, he has never learned anything because he has always known everything (*Systematic*, 185).

Scriptures that address the omniscience of God: Psalm 33:13; 37:18; 90:8; 94:7-11; 139:1-4, 11-12, 15-16; 147:4-5; Job 12:13; 37:16; Isa. 40:13-14, 27-28; 46:10; 1 Sam. 2:3; 16:7; 1 Chron. 28:9; Jer. 1:4-5; 16:17; 17:10; Hosea 7:2; Dan. 2:22; Luke 16:15; John 2:24-25; 21:17; Romans 11:33-34; 16:7; Heb. 4:13; 1 John 3:20.

God observes and knows the ways of men: Job 23:10; 24:23; 31:4; 1 Sam. 16:17; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chron. 28:9; Psalm 119:168; Rev. 2:23.

Scripture teaches divine foreknowledge of contingent events: 1 Sam. 23:10-13; 2 Kings 13:19; Psalm 81:13-15; Isa. 42:9; 48:17,18; Jer. 38:17-20.

An important point in this is that it is God's omniscience that gives meaning to all things. Robert Reymond writes:

Since God's knowledge is coextensive with all that is, this means that all created things, falling as they do within the compass of his eternal purpose and creative and providential activity, are what they are by virtue of their place in his prior eternal purpose, his wise determining counsel, and his creative and providential arrangement of things. Every fact in the universe has meaning (may I say interpretation?), then, by virtue of its place in God's purpose and governance. There is no such thing as a brute, uninterpreted datum anywhere in the entire universe scattered there by an impersonal cosmic "litterbug" that awaits man's coming to it and, by his finite wisdom and knowledge, placing a meaning on it the very first time. *Every datum of whatever kind is already a God-interpreted datum that has meaning. Every fact is a "Theistic" fact; there is not one single "non-theistic" fact anywhere in the universe. Therefore, man's knowledge of things will necessarily always be "receptively reconstructive" and never "creatively constructive" to employ Cornelius Van Til's terminology. From this it follows that if a man ever truly learns a fact to any degree his knowledge of that fact must and will coincide univocally with God's prior interpretation of that fact. And God has said something in his Word about everything in the Universe, if nothing more than that it is a created datum (What Is God?, 125-126).*

This doctrine answers Open Theism:

Open theists correctly make the point that if God infallibly knows all things, including the future acts of men, then those future acts of men are certain to occur. That does away with the Arminian concept of a liberty of indifference.

Since God knows all contingent events, does God's knowledge of all things remove any meaningful reference to the free acts of men? For example, if God foreknows an event, that event must come to pass or God's foreknowledge was wrong. For example, for there to be true knowledge, two things must be present: 1) the person must believe the proposition in question; and 2) the believed proposition must be true.

Ronald Nash writes concerning this: "If the body of all true propositions known by an omniscient being includes all true propositions about what human beings will do in the future, a serious consequence for human freedom arises. Obviously, it is impossible for an omniscient being to hold even one false belief. Since God foreknew what Jeff would do at 8 p.m. tomorrow, it appears as though Jeff *must* do what God foreknows he will do. But if Jeff *must* do whatever God knows he will do, in what sense is Jeff's action free? If God foreknows what Jeff will do in the future, does Jeff have the ability not to do what God foreknows? It seems highly unlikely. If Jeff had that power (the power to do something other than what God foreknows), then God could have been mistaken. God would have held a false belief in which case God's foreknowledge would have actually been fore-ignorance. But this is clearly impossible. If God has true foreknowledge of what human beings will do in the future, it seems that those actions are determined. But if those actions are not determined and human beings really do have the power either to do something or not, then it seems to follow that God lacks omniscience" (*The Concept of God*, 51-52).

The open theist argues that since God's omniscience is incompatible with absolute human freedom, then the concept of God's omniscience must be modified. They argue that God limits his knowledge so that he does not know the future acts of men until they actually do those acts. For example, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger in their work *The Openness of God* contend that at the time of creation, God restricted himself in regard to his omniscience and sovereignty and is, therefore, ignorant of the future free acts of men and can be taken by surprise. Clark Pinnock also argues that God limited his power so that man would have total

unabridged freedom. He views God's power and sovereignty in terms of tyranny. He sees the biblical view of God's sovereignty as that which "dominates, manipulates, coerces, and tyrannizes" people. Pinnock's concept of God is simply an idol and makes God nothing more than a good guesser concerning the future.

However, all of biblical prophecy is based on the idea of God both decreeing and, consequently, foreknowing the future.

See: Isaiah 41:22-23, 25-27; 42:8-9; 43:11-12; 44:7-8, 24-28; 45:18-21; 46:10-11; 48:3-7.

In all of these passages, God foretells the future because he knows it exhaustively. He knows it because he has decreed it in his immutable eternal purpose.

Robert Reymond writes:

. . . created forces cannot be independent forces and independent forces cannot be created forces. What these thinkers refuse to realize is that if there were one square inch in this entire universe not under his sovereign governance, God is neither absolutely sovereign nor omniscient since that one square inch would have equal claim to its own sovereignty to do as it willed, with the authority even to set up a sign saying to God, "Keep out!" This theological construction allows billions upon billions of these sovereign human "inches" to exist throughout God's universe, all denying by their own sovereign right his sovereignty over them. This construction cannot be squared with the biblical passages that teach that God did in fact foreordain whatever comes to pass, knows all things infallibly, and providentially governs all his creatures and all their actions to bring about his own holy ends (see, e.g., Acts 2:23; Rom. 9:16; Eph. 1:11; Phil. 2:13) (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*), 189-190.

See: John Frame's *No Other God* for an excellent answer to open theism.

Three points are important to consider in this:

1. God's decree of all things includes all causes and conditions in the exact order in which they come to pass. In other words, God has decreed not only events, but also all secondary causes or means.

2. Man's will is never completely free in an absolute sense. For example, it is always affected by human limitations, the power of sin, parental training, habits, the weather, etc. There is no such thing as an absolutely free will.

3. It is important to view this from two perspectives. From a heavenly perspective, God's will is never ultimately thwarted; he always accomplishes his purposes (Job 42:2; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:33-36; 8:28). From an earthly perspective, we are doing what we want to do at any given moment, without necessarily giving attention to the divine decree of God. We are doing voluntary, rational acts, but we are never free of the will of God. This has been called the liberty of spontaneity. For example, see: 1 Kings 22:2-9, 14-38. This question also opens the broader subject of God's sovereignty. This subject is an entire class in and of itself. We are going to examine just a few of the passages that relate to the sovereignty of God.

Scriptures that reveal God's ultimate sovereignty over the will of man and the flow of history:

Gen. 45:7-8; 50:20 - The wicked treatment of Joseph is an essential part of God's purpose and plan.

Job 12:10; 14:5-6 - The life of every living thing is in God's hand; man's days are determined by God and cannot be added to or diminished.

Job 12:16 - The misled and the misleader belong to God and are part of his purposes.

Job 12:23f - The fate of nations and leaders is of God.

Job 23:13f - God performs his eternal intentions for his people.

Exo. 4:11 - God said of himself that he is the one who makes men deaf, dumb, and blind.

And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?

Exo. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:20,28; 11:10; 14:4,17; 9:12-16 - The hardener of pharaoh's heart (see also: Romans 9:17,18).

Psalm 105:25 - He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtly with his servants.

God turned the heart of Egypt to hate his people.

Exo. 34:24 - God said he would govern the hearts of men so they would not covet the land he had given to Israel.

For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year.

Deut. 2:30 - God hardened the heart of Sihon, king of Heshbon.

But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as [appeareth] this day.

Josh. 11:19-20 - God hardened the hearts of every city so that they would fight Israel and "he might utterly destroy them."

1 Sam. 2:22-25 - Eli's wicked sons would not listen to their father because God wanted to put them to death.

22 Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled [at] the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

23 And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people.

24 Nay, my sons; for [it is] no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress.

25 If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.

2 Sam. 17:14 - The Lord caused Absalom to follow the inferior counsel of Hushai the archite, "in order that the Lord might bring calamity on Absalom."

And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite [is] better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom. (2 Samuel 17:14)

1 Kings 12:6-15 - God caused Rehoboam to follow the advice of the younger men "for it was a turn of events from the Lord" (vs.15).

1 Chron. 29:11 - God is head over all that is in the heavens and the earth.

Thine, O LORD, [is] the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all [that is] in the heaven and in the earth [is thine]; thine [is] the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

2 Chron. 20:6; Job 42:2; Dan. 4:35 - God is ruler over all nations and no one can stand against him.

2 Chron 25:20 - Amaziah did not heed the warning of Joash because God willed to deliver them into the hand of Joash.

But Amaziah would not hear; for it [came] of God, that he might deliver them into the hand [of their enemies], because they sought after the gods of Edom. (2 Chronicles 25:20)

Prov. 21:1 - The king's heart is controlled by God.

The king's heart [is] in the hand of the LORD, [as] the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

Psa. 115:3; 33:11,12; 135:6 - God does what he pleases and his counsel stands forever.

Prov. 16:1,4,9,33; 19:21; 20:24; 21:30,31 - Every decision, direction, and purpose is from God.

The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, [is] from the LORD. (Proverbs 16:1)

The LORD hath made all [things] for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Proverbs 16:4)

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

Isa. 10:5-7 - God's sovereignty over Assyria.

Isa. 19:2,14 - God's sovereignty over Egypt.

Isa. 14:24-27; 25:1; 29:13f 30:28; 31:2; 41:4 - God plans and it occurs.

Isa. 40:8 - The word of God stands forever.

Isa. 43:13; 44:24-28 - The Lord acts and it cannot be reversed.

Yea, before the day [was] I [am] he; and [there is] none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it? (Isa. 43:13)

24 Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I [am] the LORD that maketh all [things]; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;

25 That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise [men] backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish;

26 That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof:

27 That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers:

28 That saith of Cyrus, [He is] my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. (Isaiah 44:24-28)

Isa. 45:4-12 (esp. vs. 7); Lam. 3:1-38 (esp. vs. 37,38); Zech. 8:14,15 - God causes peace and calamity.

Matt. 26:24; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28 - The inhuman treatment of Christ was in accord with the predetermined plan of God.

The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. (Matthew 26:24)

And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! (Luke 22:22)

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: (Acts 2:23)

For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. (Acts 4:28)

Acts 17:26 - God determined the boundaries and inhabitants of every nation.

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; (Acts 17:26)

God represents himself in Scripture as the sovereign ruler of his universe.

Some Arminian theologians have argued that while God infallibly knows the future, nevertheless future certainty is not future necessity. Therefore, mankind still has a liberty or freedom of indifference. This is simply a semantic difference between "certainty" and "necessity."

Gordon Clark writes:

On the road below, to the observer's left, a car is being driven west. To the observer's right a car is coming south. He can see and know that there will be a collision at the intersection immediately beneath him. But his foreknowledge, so the argument runs, does not cause [that is make necessary] the accident. Similarly, God is supposed to know the future without causing it.

The similarity, however, is deceptive on several points. A human observer cannot really know that a collision will occur. Though it is unlikely, it is possible for both cars to have blowouts before reaching the intersection and swerve apart. It is also possible that the observer has misjudged speeds, in which case one car could slow down and other accelerate, so that they would not collide. The human observer, therefore, does not infallible foreknowledge.

No such mistakes can be assumed for God. The human observer may make a probable guess that the accident will occur, and this guess does not make the accident unavoidable; but if God knows, there is no possibility of avoiding the accident. A hundred years before the drivers were born, there was no possibility that either of them could have chosen to stay home that day, to have driven a different route, to have driven a different time, to have driven a different speed. They could not have chosen otherwise than as they did. This means either that they had no free will [understood as a liberty of indifference] or that God did not know.

Suppose it be granted, just for the moment, that divine foreknowledge, like human guesses, does not cause the foreknown event. Even so, if there is foreknowledge, in contrast with fallible guesses, free will is impossible. If man has free will, and things

can be different, God cannot be omniscient. Some Arminians have admitted this and have denied omniscience [the open theists], but this puts them obviously at odds with Biblical Christianity. There is also another difficulty. If the Arminian . . . wishes to retain divine omniscience and at the same time assert that foreknowledge has no causal efficacy, he is put to explain how the collision was made certain a hundred years, an eternity, before the drivers were born. If God did not arrange the universe this way, who did?

If God did not arrange it this way, then there must be an independent factor in the universe. And if there is such, one consequence and perhaps two follow. First, the doctrine of creation must be abandoned. . . . Independent forces cannot be created forces, and created forces cannot be independent. Then, second, if the universe is not God's creation, his knowledge of it - past and future - cannot depend on what he intends to do, but on his observation of how it works. In such a case, how could we be sure that God's observations are accurate? How could we be sure that these independent forces will not later show us an unsuspected twist that will falsify God's predictions? And finally, on this view God's knowledge would be empirical, rather than an integral part of his essence, and thus he would be a dependent knower. These objections are insurmountable. We can consistently believe in creation, omnipotence, omniscience, and the divine decree. But we cannot retain sanity and combine any of these with free will.

From: *God and Evil* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2004), 25-26. Cited in Reymond, *What Is God?*, 132-133.

Application:

1. This gives comfort and encouragement to believers. No matter how difficult a situation or trial is, our infinitely wise God is in control and has an eternal purpose he is working out. God works out all things for the good of his elect (Rom. 8:28).
2. This also restrains believers from sin. No one can hide from God's presence. Adam could not hide; Achan could not hide his theft of the banned treasure from Jericho; David could not hide his adultery and murder. Neither can we hide our sins.

God tells all people that their sin will find them out (Num 32:23).

3. This should fill us with amazement and awe. The wisest person does not know what the next minute will bring, but all futurity down to the minutest detail is known to God.

4. This should fill believers with worship, adoration, and praise when they remember that God knows their every lapse and sin before the foundation of the world and still set his love on them (Jer. 31:3; Eph. 1:3-7), and having loved them, gave his Son for them, and will love them to the end of the world, through the final judgment, and throughout all eternity.

5. God demonstrates his many-faceted or manifold in the church (Eph. 3:9-10). The redeemed community demonstrates God's manifold wisdom. God never says anywhere else (*polypoikilos* is a *hapax legomenon*) that by anything else the angels see such a display.

He did not display his manifold wisdom when he:

- a) spoke suns, moons, and stars in existence;
- b) made man in his own image;
- c) governed all things in his providence.

The Bible does not mention any of these things in this regard, but it does mention the church. The grand object of angel's attention today is the church because God's wisdom is seen there. The entrance into the church through Christ's work of redemption displays the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24) for it is in that work that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith (Rom. 1:16), and if it is by faith, then it is by the grace of God (Rom. 4:16).

The angels saw God's power when he spoke creation into existence. They saw his justice when he cast Satan and his angels out of heaven. But, it is only in God's plan of salvation and the church created by it, beginning with Gen. 3:15 onward that his manifold wisdom is displayed. His mercy, grace, kindness, longsuffering, and gentleness is seen in the work of redemption.

This shows us the importance and worth of the church. When angels see the ruin and misery which sin brought to man removed through the death and resurrection of Jesus, they stand amazed at the manifold wisdom of God.

Robert Reymond, in applying this point to church relationships, writes:

Even the poorest, lowliest, least gifted member of the church - now think for a moment: of the Christians you know, who in your estimation would you judge him or her to be? I hope at least some of you thought of yourselves! - well, even that person - the poorest, lowliest, least gifted Christian - exhibits to the angelic host of heaven God's "manifold wisdom," and we should not despise that one but rather hold him in high esteem, for the angels surely do (*What Is God?*, 136)!

INFINITE, ETERNAL, AND UNCHANGEABLE IN HIS POWER

God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful.

Scriptures dealing with this: Gen. 17:1; 18:11-14; Exo. 15:6-11; Psalm 18:13-15; 89:8-13; Job 26:7-14 (note in vs. 14 that these are the mere fringes of his ways - *shemets*, "faint whisper"); Job. 28:26; Isaiah 40:12, 15, 17-18, 22-23, 25-26, 28-31; Jer. 10:8-13; 32:17, 26-27; Dan. 4:34-35; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:34, 37; Eph. 1:19-20; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15; Rev. 19:6. Most of the Scriptures dealing with God's sovereignty address this issue.

Charles Spurgeon said, "God's power is like himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the Omnipotent One. He sits on no buttressed throne and leans on no assisting arm. His court is not maintained by His courtiers, nor does it borrow its splendor from His creatures. He is Himself the great central source and Originator of all power."

Cited by A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 47.

Qualifications that are important:

1. This is not to be understood in the sense that God can do anything. God can do with power whatever it takes power to do. However, this does not mean that God has the power to do the irrational. For example, God cannot make a square circle. There are also some divine "cannot's" in Scripture where we see the glory of God reflected.

God cannot:

cease to exist or cease to be God;

divest himself of any of his attributes;

exercise all of his power since it has no limits;

change (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Mal. 3:6);

disown himself (2 Tim. 2:13);

lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:17-18);

ignore sin (Hab. 1:13);

allow his grace to override his justice; if he would be the justifier of sinful men in his grace, he must still be just and uphold his law and have a valid ground for such justification (Rom. 3:25-26), which ground, of course, is the work of Christ (Reymond, *What Is God?*, 158).

2. God has can never do anything that will exhaust his power.

Robert Reymond writes: ". . . it is inherently impossible for the infinitely powerful God ever to employ all of his power. To say that he can immediately places a limitation upon it. The fact of the matter is that to nothing in the Universe or to the Universe itself can I direct your attention as the visible result or the display of the full exercise of omnipotence, that is *all* of his power (Reymond, *What Is God?*, 153-154).

Stephen Charnock stated:

When I have spoken of Divine power all that I can, when you have thought all that you can think of it, your souls will prompt you to conceive something more beyond what I have spoken and you have thought . . . there is infinitely more power lodged in His nature [that is] not expressed in the world (*Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:9-10).

In a sense, the created universe is more of a hiding of God's infinite power than a revelation of it. God has the power to infinitely more than he has done or revealed up to this time.

3. God cannot stop being who he is. He cannot set aside his omnipotence or any of his attributes. For example, he cannot cease being sovereign over his creation - cannot make a rock so big he can't lift it. Omnipotence means that God can do whatever it takes power to do. John Frame writes:

God's power always accomplishes his purpose. God does not intend to bring about everything he values, but he never fails to bring about what he intends (*No Other God: A Response to Open Theism*, 113).

For example, God could at this time rid the universe of all evil, but for wise and holy reasons, which he has determined from all eternity, he does not will to do this yet. One day all evil will be done way with by God.

Application:

1. This could be applied as an exhortation to all of God's enemies to submit to him now. Psa. 2:12
2. To all God's enemies who would desire to make peace with him, trust that God is able to lift a person out of sin and misery, change their hearts, and save them forever in Christ. Psa. 103:12; Isa. 26:4.
3. We can never dare to distrust him. God is able to deliver us from all our sorrows, grief, and meet our needs. The one who sustains all the universe with the word of his power is able provide our daily clothing and bread. Psa. 118:4
4. We should have no fear of men. They are but grass that wither and be no more. Psa. 1:4-6; Rom. 8:31f.
5. We should commit our futures to him. God is sovereignly working out his purpose in all of history and in our personal history. Rom. 8:28
6. We should trust him in all our ministry activities. His power is made perfect in our weakness. 2 Cor. 12:9; Isa. 41:15-16.

INFINITE, ETERNAL, AND UNCHANGEABLE IN HIS HOLINESS

There are two aspects to the holiness of God: 1. His majestic holiness; 2. His ethical holiness.

1. Majestic holiness.

God's majestic holiness refers to his transcendence. He is separate and transcendent from his creation.

Exodus 15:11; 1 Sam. 2:2; Isa. 8:13; 57:15; Hosea 11:9.

See: Isaiah 6:1-6.

This scene sets forth, first of all, God majestic holiness. The seraphim do not need to cover their feet and faces because of sin; they are sinless. However, they are created beings and, therefore, just being in the presence of God necessitates that they cover themselves. If even sinless creatures are depicted as covering themselves in his presence, how much more sinful man should bow before his majestic holiness. We bow our heads and close our eyes in prayer, not just to keep from distraction.

The majestic holiness of God reveals sin to Isaiah; he has an awareness of sin. He is undone, not just because of sin but because he is in the immediate presence of God (see vs. 1 and compare to 2 Chron. 26:4, 16-21).

We need to remember that God's job is not to forgive, but to be holy.

Other examples of God's majestic holiness are seen in the miracles of Jesus and any supernatural working of God. See: Mark 4:35 - 5:17; Luke 5:1-8 - Notice the reaction of those who encountered the majestic holiness of God demonstrated through Jesus' actions.

Geerhardus Vos writes:

Taking the divine holiness in this form, we can easily perceive that it is not really an attribute to be coordinated with the other attributes distinguished in the divine nature. It is something co-extensive with and applicable to everything that can be predicated of God: he is holy in everything that characterizes Him and reveals Him, holy in His goodness and grace, no less than in His righteousness and wrath. From:

Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 265.

Louis Berkhof similarly states:

[The] fundamental idea [of God's holiness] is that of a position or relationship existing between God and some person or thing. In its original sense it denotes that He is absolutely distinct from all his creatures, and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. So understood, the holiness of God is one of his transcendental attributes, and is sometimes spoken of as His central and supreme perfection. It does not seem proper to speak of one attribute of God as being more central and fundamental than another; but if this were permissible, the Scriptural emphasis on the holiness of God would seem to justify its selection. It is quite evident . . . that holiness in this sense of the word . . . is . . . something that is co-extensive with, and applicable to, everything that can be predicated of God. He is holy in everything that reveals Him, in His goodness and grace as well as in His justice and wrath. It may be called the "majesty-holiness" of God [and] this holiness . . . includes such ideas as "absolute unapproachability" . . . or "creature-feeling," leading to absolute self-abasement. From: *Systematic Theology*, 73.

2. Ethical holiness.

The ethical holiness of God addresses the purity or righteousness of God.

This attribute of God contains the idea that God is separate from evil and affirms God's moral excellence or ethical purity.

Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology* defines the ethical holiness of God as "that perfection of God, in virtue of which he eternally wills and maintains his own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity of his moral creatures."

Psa. 5:4-6; 11:5-7; 15; 33:5; Isa. 6:5; Job 34:10; Hab. 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Gen. 3 - God drove sinful man out of the garden. This attribute of God is closely tied to the justice of God whereby God maintains his ethical holiness against every violation of it.

Stephen Charnock writes:

As power is [God's] hand and arm; omniscience, his eye; mercy, his bowels; eternity, his duration; [so] his [ethical] holiness is his beauty From: *The Existence and Attributes of God* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:113.

In this regard consider: Psa. 24:7; 110:3.

On the basis of his holiness, God demands that his people be holy: Lev.11:44-45; 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 Thess. 4:3, 7; Heb. 12:14.

This should awaken in us a sense of total dependence, incompetence, of no longer being in control, an "undone-ness" (Isa. 6:5). Unless, we are recipients of God's grace in Christ, his holiness assures final judgment against all sin. If we are recipients of God's grace, then we should be captivated by the beauty and majesty of God's holiness. An apprehension of God's grace in Christ should cause us to long for the one who is so great and has showed us so much mercy in Christ (Phil. 1:23).

This also means that apart from Christ, sinful man cannot enter into the presence of a holy God.

INFINITE, ETERNAL, AND UNCHANGEABLE IN HIS JUSTICE

God's justice can be defined as that perfection of his divine nature by which God maintains his own ethical holiness over against every violation of it. He will reward that which is consistent with his righteous standards and punish that which is not. In Scripture, the terms "justice" and "righteousness" can not be distinguished from each other. Context determines the intent of the term.

Human judges are considered just judges if their judgments adhere to a righteous law which is above them. However, the ultimate standard for justice is God's own holy nature. There is no law or standard above him to which he must conform to derive his standard of justice. His own innate and intrinsic knowledge of truth is the basis of his justice. For us, this standard of justice is set forth in the law of God.

The idea of God's justice or righteousness is usually considered from two perspectives: retributive justice or righteousness and distributive justice or righteousness.

Retributive righteousness texts: Gen. 18:25; Psa. 7:11; 9:7-8; 62:12; 94:1-3; 96:10, 13; 119:137; 145:17; Prov. 24:12; Isa. 5:16; Jer. 12:1; Dan. 9:14; Luke 13:1-5; John 17:25; Rom. 2:5-6; 3:5-6; 2 Thess. 1:5-9; Rev. 16:5-7.

Consider: Gen. 6:5f (the flood); 19:24; Lev. 10:1-3; 2 Sam. 6:1-8; Psa. 9:17; Mal. 4:1; Rev. 14:10-11

Robert Reymond writes, "Acting retributively, God reacts to human conduct, both good and evil, with absolute propriety. He condones nothing; and He overlooks no mitigating or extenuating factor. Since dishonoring the infinite God by sinning against Him is worse than destroying countless worlds, even the impenitent's smallest sin has infinite disvalue for which no created good can compensate God by way of satisfaction (*What Is God?*, 202-203).

Degrees of punishment in hell reflect God's justice - Rom. 2:5-6; Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 12:46-48; 20:45-47. Jonathan Edwards, in commenting on degrees of punishment in hell said, "The lost in hell would give the world and all beside if they could if the number of their sins could be one less."

Jonathan Edwards, in his famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, proclaimed:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath toward you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else that you did not go to hell last night; that you were allowed to awake again in this world after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell since you have sat here in the house of God provoking his pure eyes by your sinful manner

of attending this solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop into hell.

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against any of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment. . . .

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell, and if God should let you go you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf; and your healthy constitution and your own care and prudence and best contrivance and all your righteousness would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell than a spiders web would have to stop a falling rock.

The section in R. C. Sproul's *The Holiness of God* dealing with the justice of God is an excellent treatment of this point.

Distributive Righteousness

The dominant theme of God's righteousness in Scripture is not his retributive righteousness or justice, but his distributive righteousness. This refers to God's salvific righteousness, the righteousness which is imputed in our justification.

Deeds of redemption, salvation, and deliverance are revelations of God's righteousness. See: Judges 5:11, 1 Sam. 12:7, Psa. 103:6, Isa. 45:24-25, Micah 6:5.

The question is how can a righteous and holy judge forgive sins and still maintain his righteousness? The work of Christ addresses this. Jesus was obedient for us and paid the price of disobedience on the cross for his elect. Rom. 3:25-26; 5:17-19.

Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers. Rom. 3:21-28; 4:1-8; Gal. 3:6-13; 2:16; Phil 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21.

Robert Reymond writes:

. . . because of his covenant fidelity God does not turn destructively on his elect who have placed their confidence in him. Because the covenant threat would and ultimately did exhaust itself in Christ's suffering at Calvary, God's people are immune to his wrath, and his *rectitude* or righteousness in covenant-keeping leads him to save and to vindicate them. In Christ's obedience and suffering they have met all the demands of God's justice, and their forgiveness is a matter of covenant right (*What Is God?*, 213).

The Old Testament sets forth the distributive righteousness of God in stronger terms than it does God's retributive righteousness. Therefore, it anticipates the New Testament revelation of Christ's work. In fact, it often directly predicts Christ's work in terms of God's distributive righteousness (Jer. 23:5; Zech. 3:4, 8; Isa. 61:10). This righteousness comes by faith alone (Rom. 1:17; 3:28; 4:16; Gal. 2:16).

This means that there is no salvation by so-called "good works." As R. C. Sproul often points out, many people simply believe in justification by death. Everyone who dies simply goes to heaven.

INFINITE, ETERNAL, AND UNCHANGEABLE IN HIS GOODNESS

The goodness of God is a catch word to include all the biblical concepts of the grace, love, and mercy of God toward man in his sin. Robert Reymond writes:

If it is God's attribute of majestic holiness that exhibits his *transcendence* over his *finite* creation, it is his attribute of goodness that manifests his *condescendence* toward his *sinful* creation. For just as the *Catechism* subsumes God's omnipresence under the infinitude of his being and his knowledge under the rubric of his wisdom, so also it intends this single beautiful word "goodness" as the subsuming category under which God's love, common and special grace, mercy, pity, patience, compassion, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, benevolence, generosity, faithfulness, joy when the sinner the repents, grief when his child sins, and other such expressions of his

tender and fatherly character are to be placed (*What Is God?*, 233-234).

Wayne Grudem concurs and observes that "God's mercy is his goodness toward those in distress, his grace is his goodness toward those who deserve only punishment [and] his patience is his goodness toward those who continue to sin over a period of time" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 198).

This is the perfection of God which prompts him to deal kindly and bountifully with all his creatures.

It is important to remember that after man sinned, he forfeited all claims to life and any blessing from God. Grace, love, forgiveness is not owed to man; punishment for sin (justice) is owed.

Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29 (this was the original display of God's intrinsic goodness); Exo. 33:19; Psa. 33:5 (*hesed* - This is not an easy word to translate. It is often translated as "lovingkindness" or "unfailing love," but these fall short of all that it means. In many contexts it alludes to God's "covenant mercy."); Psa. 34:8; 73:1; 103:1-6, 7-17, 22; 106:1, 44-46; Psa. 107 in its entirety, particularly the repeated expression in verses 1, 8, 15, 21, 31; 118:1, 29; 119:68; 145:7-9, 13, 15-16; Isa. 55:6-7; Micah 7:18; Matt. 5:45-48 (it is best not to think of *teleioi* "perfect" as "morally perfect" but as "all-inclusive in the administration of one's goodness." See Lukan parallel in Luke 6:36); Mark 10:18; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:4; 8:28 (If you assume the prerogative of defining the good for you, you will always have problems with Romans 8:28 because you will exclude many things that God puts into it and include many things that God excludes. For example, one person might define "good" as financial prosperity, no frustrations, or, no sickness.); James 1:17; 1 John 4:8.

God provides food and moves to relieve and comfort human misery and distress even among the lost. This classically called common grace. It is also God's goodness and love that prompted his unmerited favor in the plan of salvation through Christ's work.

While God gives just retribution to the sinner, he does not take pleasure or glee in the death of the wicked. God is simply being retributively just.

Micah 7:18-19; Ezek. 33:11.

Robert Reymond writes: “. . . all that proceeds from him - from his eternal purpose and its execution by his works of creation and providence to the dropping of the final curtain on earth history in the Eschaton - is good. From the simplest living cell to man, his crowning act of creation, one may see on display the goodness of God” (*What Is God?*, 239). See: Psa. 139:14.

An important point on this is that since God is infinitely good and goodness is an intrinsic part of his nature, then he is the ultimate good. This means that he is the standard of good. The Greek philosophers tried to discover what is man’s “good.” As Christians, we have that information. We know that “good” is whatever God approves of and “bad” is whatever his disapproves and declares as bad. Why is what God approves “good?” Because there is no other standard of good higher than God’s character. He has informed us what the standard of *moral* goodness for man is in his holy law, the covenant norm for human behavior. Consider Isa. 5:20f.

Robert Reymond points out that the *Shorter Catechism* addresses the issue of the love of God under this general category of “goodness.” In many Reformed works on the attributes of God, the love of God is subsumed under the category of goodness also. He writes:

But, my brothers and sisters, such handling of this divine attribute, in my opinion, does *not* do justice to the New Testament’s emphasis, for in the writings of the New Testament God’s love is the very essence of his nature (1 John 4:8), the source of our election (see “. . . in love he predestined us,” Eph. 1:4-5), the fountain from which flows all of his gracious redemptive activity (John 3:16), and the supreme message of Calvary. Does not the Apostle John inform us in 1 John 4:8-10 that “God[’s very essence] is love,” and does he not go on to say: “This is how the love of God was manifested among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”? Twice in these three verses the Apostle John singles out God’s sending his Son, first into the world and then to Calvary, as the tangible,

concrete, revelational expression of God's great love for Christians. Does not the same Apostle also inform us: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16)? And does not the Apostle Paul say virtually the same thing: "God demonstrated his own love for us in this way: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8)? And does he not also say that "Christ loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20) and that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25)? All of these statements regarding divine love's self-expression focus our attention on God's love-gift to mankind of the cross of Christ.

So, in my opinion, our Reformed tradition's dogmatic pronouncements have been guilty of "heresy of disproportion" when they subsume God's patient longsuffering and his redeeming love under his "goodness" and fail to mention them in their definitions of God (*What Is God?*, 243-244).

We can think about this from two perspectives. First, God's patience and longsuffering; Second, God's immeasurable love.

God's patience and longsuffering

The Bible declares that God is patient and slow to anger. However, it is important to note that God's patience is not eternal and unchangeable toward all sinners because times do come when his patience comes to an end and he brings judgment for sin.

When we think of this characteristic of God's goodness and love, we need to remember that God does not need anything. God does not need man. He is sovereign over his universe and his will is the resistless law of all existences to which every motion conforms. Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne. This background emphasizes the magnitude of the Scriptures which speak of his longsuffering. See: Exo. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Psa. 85:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Neh. 9:17; Hosea 11:8-9; Micah 7:18; Ezek. 18:32; 33:11; Jer. 9:24; Lam. 3:33. These passages indicate that God does not eagerly punish sinners. For example, we see that he first digs around and fertilizes the barren tree before he removes it (Luke 13:8-9). He gives continual warnings in his Word about his righteous judgment and the final condition of sinners. He has ordered in providence that from thousands of evangelical pulpits the call to repentance and the warning of final judgment goes forth. God

extends life to sinners and is not always swift to execute judgment.

In light of the terrible provocation that sinners exercise toward God, his longsuffering is astounding.

God's Love

Consider 1 John 4:8-10; Rom. 5:6-11; Phil. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 8:9. This would include all of the Old Testament's messianic promises which found their fulfillment in Christ's work. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 27 summarizes this:

"Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time."

The sending of the Son both in the incarnation and for the purpose of redemption demonstrate God's love. God desires to be with his people (2 Tim. 2:19) and rejoices when that union is realized (Zeph. 3:17).

INFINITE, ETERNAL, AND UNCHANGEABLE IN HIS TRUTH

Definition: God's attribute of truth is that perfection of God which affirms his own realized Godness. Therefore, it is that character of God that assures us of the ethical reliability of his revelations, assures us of his rationality, and assures us of his faithfulness to his people.

A. The idea of God's attribute of truth is used in a variety of ways in Scripture:

1. Used in a metaphorical sense - only one true God as opposed to the falsehood of idols.

Jer. 10:8-16; Psa. 31:5-6; Jonah 2:8-9; John 1:17; 14:6; 17:3;
1 John 5:20

2. Used in reference to his Word. Titus 1:2, Heb. 6:18;
John 17:17.

3. Used in reference to God's covenantal faithfulness.

Exo. 34:6-7; Deut. 32:4; Psalm 25:10; 1 John 5:20-21 (Important verse because the idea of one true God is here applied to the Son as well as the Father).

4. The above implies that God is logically rational. There is no contradiction within him or in his Word.

Some theologians argue that, while God knows all truth and his Word is completely true, we can never know any more an an analogical comprehension of truth. They argue that man may never know univocally anything as God knows a thing. This means that man can never know any truth as revealed by God.

Part of the problem with this (besides a Scriptural one) is that if an analogy does not have a univocal element, it is really not an analogy at all, but an equivocation. Cornelius Van Til was the main theologian who taught this position and was very influential. In his "Introduction" to Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, Van Til writes:

When the Christian restates the content of Scriptural revelation in the form of a "system," such a system is based upon and therefore analogous to the "existential system" that God himself possesses. Being based upon God's revelation it is, on the one hand, fully true and, on the other hand, *at no point identical* with the content of the divine mind. From: Cornelius Van Til, "Introduction" to *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* Benjamin B. Warfield (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 171.

This directly contradicts Jesus' statements in John 12:49-50 and John 17:6-17. Jesus asserts in these passages that he gave us the Father's true word. He gave them this word from his Father just as his Father had given it to him.

Gordon Clark, in debating this point in Van Til argues that this leads to total human ignorance of truth:

If God knows all truths and knows the correct meaning of every proposition, and if no proposition means to man what it means to God, so that God's knowledge and man's knowledge do not coincide at any single point, it follows by rigorous necessity that man can have no truth. From: Gordon H. Clark, "Apologetics" in *Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. by Carl F. H. Henry (New York: Harper Channel, 1957), 159.

Clark also writes:

If God and man know, there must with the differences be at least one point of similarity; for if there were no point of similarity it would be inappropriate to use the one term knowledge in both cases. . . . If God has the truth and if man has only an analogy, it follows that he (man) does not have the truth (Gordon H. Clark, "The Bible as Truth" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April, 1957): 163.

Robert Reymond, in commenting on this debate writes:

I would assert that Clark is correct. And we Christians should be overwhelmed by the magnitude of this simply fact that we take so much for granted - *that the infinite personal God had deigned to share with us in a univocal way some of the truths that are on his mind. He has condescended to elevate us poor undeserving sinners to the status of "truth-knowers" by actually sharing univocally with us a portion of the truth that he knows.*

But, someone asks, does not Isaiah 55:8-9 teach that an unbridgeable gulf exists between the content of God's knowledge and the content of our knowledge? No, far from it! These verses actually hold out the real possibility that people may know God's thoughts, and they urge the wicked to turn from their thoughts that are fickle and wicked and learn God's thoughts from him. In Isaiah 55:7 God calls upon the wicked man to forsake his ways and thoughts. Why? "Because," says the Lord, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (55:8). The entire context, far from affirming that God's thoughts are beyond the capacity of human beings to know, expressly calls on the wicked man to turn, in repentance and humility, from his thoughts and to seek and to think God's thoughts after him (Reymond, *What Is God?*, 275).

This means that we must oppose any concept of truth which would take away the possibility of having true knowledge from God

B. God's Word is logically rational, ethically steadfast, and covenantally faithful (Reymond).

1. God's Word is logically rational. It does not contradict itself or present truth in ways that cannot be reconciled (apparent contradictions that cannot be reconciled).

In addressing this issue, the logical starting point is the fact that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). This means that God's inscripturated propositional revelation to us is true and self-consistent. The fact that God is a God of truth also implies that God is rational and logical and that his knowledge is self-consistent. God thinks in a way that does not violate the so-called laws of logic: the law of identity (A is A), the law of non-contradiction (A is not non-A), and the law of the excluded middle (A is either A or non-A). This is the basis for the Christian position that there are no contradictions in Scripture. The rational character of God necessitates that his propositional self-revelation in Scripture be true and non-contradictory. Therefore, in the process of doing theology, there should be a commitment to interpret the Scriptures in a noncontradictory way. Since the Scriptures are the product of a single divine mind (2 Timothy 3:16), then the Bible student should work to harmonize Scripture with Scripture. If the position is adopted that, even after proper interpretation, the Bible teaches a system of theology that will come to us in terms of contradictions, then any attempt at systematic theology is doomed to failure. Robert Reymond writes concerning this:

What should one say respecting this oft-repeated notion that the Bible will often (always, according to Van Til) set forth its truths in irreconcilable terms? To say the least, one must conclude, if such is the case, that it condemns at the outset as futile even the attempt at the systematic (orderly) theology that Van Til calls for in the last source cited, since it is impossible to reduce to a system irreconcilable paradoxes that steadfastly resist all attempts at harmonious systematization. One must be content simply to live theologically with a series of "discontinuities." From: Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 105. I am indebted to Robert Reymond's works and lectures from which these points are adapted. I especially recommend: *Preach The Word!* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1988); *The Justification of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976).

There are some theologians who hold that after all hermeneutical work is done, the teaching of Scripture will come to in terms of apparent contradiction or paradox. For example, R. B. Kuiper, president of Calvin Seminary writes:

A paradox is not, as Barth thinks, two truths that are actually contradictory. Truth is not irrational [yes]. Nor is a paradox two truths which are difficult to reconcile but can be reconciled before the bar of human reason. That is a seeming paradox [yes]. But when two truths, both taught unmistakably in the infallible Word of God, cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason, then you have a paradox [NO!].

From: R. B. Kuiper, cited by George W. Martson, *The Voice of Authority* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 16.

J. I. Packer also holds the position that when the Scriptures are properly interpreted, the resultant theology will contain apparent antinomies. He writes:

For the whole point of an antinomy - in theology, at any rate - is that it is not a real contradiction, though it looks like one. It is an *apparent* incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear and solid evidence, but it is a mystery to you how they can be squared with each other. You see that each must be true on its own, but you do not see how they can both be true together. . . . What should one do, then, with an antinomy? Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real; put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding; think of the two principles as, not rival alternatives, but, in some way that at present you do not grasp, complementary to each other.

The antinomy which we face now [between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility] is only one of a number that the Bible contains. We may be sure that they all find their reconciliation in the mind and counsel of God, and we may hope that in heaven we

shall understand them ourselves. But meanwhile, our wisdom is to maintain with equal emphasis both the apparently conflicting truths in each case, to hold them together in the relation in which the Bible itself sets them, and to recognize that here is a mystery which we cannot expect to solve in this world. From: James I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 18, 21, 24.

Another example of a conservative, Reformed theologian holding the idea that after the Bible is properly interpreted, a host of apparent contradictories will be present is Anthony Hoekema. At the beginning of his book *Saved By Grace*, he introduces this concept. He writes:

We could say that we are here dealing with what is commonly called a paradox - that is, a combination of two thoughts which seem to contradict each other. It does not seem possible for us to harmonize in our minds these two facets of biblical truth: that on the one hand God must sanctify us wholly but that on the other hand we must work out our sanctification by perfecting our holiness. Nor does it seem possible for us to harmonize these two apparently contradictory thoughts: that God is totally sovereign over our lives, directing them in accordance with his will, but that nevertheless, we are required to make our own decisions and are held totally responsible for them.

We must believe, however, that both sides of these apparently contradictory sets of thoughts are true, since the Bible teaches both. From: Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 5.

George Marston states that doctrines such as the Trinity, the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Christ, God's sovereignty and human responsibility, unconditional election and the sincere preaching of the gospel, particular redemption and the universal offer of the gospel - all foundational doctrines of Reformed theology - are all biblical paradoxes each setting forth antithetical truths which cannot be reconciled at the bar of human reason. See: George W. Martson, *The Voice of Authority* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960).

Added to this list could be the current controversy over justification by faith alone in which the federal vision argues that we are justified by faith alone and by faith plus works.

Cornelius Van Til states that, because human knowledge is "only analogical" to God's knowledge, all Christian truth will finally be paradoxical:

[Antinomies] are involved in the fact that human knowledge can never be completely comprehensive knowledge. Every knowledge transaction has in it somewhere a reference point to God. Now since God is not fully comprehensible to us we are bound to come into what seems to be contradictions in all our knowledge. Our knowledge is analogical and therefore must be paradoxical. The thing we are concerned about here is to point out that in the nature of the case there would have to be such a paradox or seeming contradiction in human knowledge. God exists as self-complete apart from us; he is all-glorious. Yet he created the universe that it might glorify him. This point lies at the bottom of every paradox or antinomy' From: Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 44-45.

While we shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory we embrace with passion the idea of the apparently contradictory. From: Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 9.

All teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory. *Ibid.*, 142.

All the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory. . . . In the case of common grace, as in the case of every other biblical doctrine, we should seek to take all the factors of Scripture teaching and bind them together into systematic relations with one another as far as we can. But we do not expect to have a logically deducible relationship between one doctrine and another. We expect to have only an analogical system. *Ibid.*, 165-166.

Robert Reymond comments on this position:

What must we say about this notion that the Bible will often, if not always, set forth its truths in irreconcilably contradictory terms? To say the least, if this were the case, then every attempt to arrange the Bible's theology systematically is "dead in the water" before it begins since it is impossible to reduce to a system irreconcilable contradictories that steadfastly resist all attempts at harmonization. One must abandon the effort to systematize the propositions of Scripture and be content simply to live with a veritable nest of theological "discontinuities." From: *What Is God?*, 280.

The first problem with this concept of apparent paradoxes or antinomies being present in Scripture is that it is impossible for a person to affirm that such a phenomenon exists in Scripture. Simply because some theologians have not been able to reconcile to their satisfaction two or more given truths of Scripture, does not mean that reconciliation is impossible. Therefore, the definition of *apparent paradox* or *antinomy* as two truths which cannot be reconciled at the bar of human reason is dubious. For a person to hold this position and make this assertion, he would have to be omniscient. He would have to have the knowledge that no one who lived in the past and no one in the present has ever been able to reconcile the truths. He would also have to have the knowledge that no one who will ever live will be able to reconcile the truths. However, no human being is in possession of this kind of omniscience. Therefore, the assertion that the Scriptures contain apparent paradoxes is flawed by its very definition. The fact that some theologians have not found it possible to reconcile some so-called apparent paradoxes does not prove that the truths cannot be reconciled.

A second problem with the claim that the Scriptures contain paradoxes or antinomies is that the position removes the ability to discern a real falsehood. Those who hold this position are quick to point out that these paradoxes are only *apparent* contradictions and not real ones. However, if noncontradictory truths can come in terms of "apparent contradiction," then how can a real contradiction be distinguished from only an apparent contradiction? Since it is claimed that these apparent contradictions can never be resolved at the bar of human reason and no amount of study or reflection will bring a resolution to them, then it is impossible for one to know whether he is holding an apparent contradiction or a real contradiction. This is another reason why embracing the position of the existence of apparent antinomies in Scripture makes the possibility of

systematic theology impossible. In fact, it makes the possibility of knowing truth and discerning a real falsehood impossible. Robert Reymond writes:

. . . once one asserts that a truth may legitimately assume the form of an irreconcilable contradiction, he has given up all possibility of ever detecting a real falsehood. Every time he rejects a proposition as false because it "contradicts" the teaching of Scripture or because it is in some other way illogical, the proposition's sponsor only needs to contend that it only appears to contradict Scripture or be illogical, and that his proposition is simply one of the terms (the Scripture may provide the other) of one more of those paradoxes which we have acknowledged have a legitimate place in our "little systems," to borrow a phrase from Alfred, Lord Tennyson. But this means both the end of Christianity's uniqueness as the revealed religion of God since it is then liable to - nay, more than this, it must be open to - the assimilation of any and every truth claim of whatever kind, and the death of all rational faith. From: Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 106-107.

A third problem with holding that truth can come in the form of apparent contradiction is the problem of meaning in any paradox or antinomy defined in this manner. If two truths are presented as unresolvable contradictions, then what do they mean? David Bassinger comments on this point:

If concepts such as human freedom and divine sovereignty are really contradictory at the human level, then. . . they are at the human level comparable to the relationship between a square and a circle. Now let us assume that God has told us in Scripture that he had created square circles. . . . The fundamental problem would be one of meaning. We can say the phrase "square circle," and we conceive of squares and we can conceive of circles. But since a circle is a nonsquare by definition and a square is noncircular by definition, it is not at all clear that we can conceive of a square circle - that is, conceive of something that is both totally a square and totally a circle at the same time. This is because on the human level, language

(and thought about linguistic referents) presupposes the law of noncontradiction. "Square" is a useful term because to say something is square distinguishes it from other objects that are not squares. But if something can be a square and also not a square at the same time, then our ability to conceive of, and thus identify and discuss, squares is destroyed. In short, "square" no longer remains from the human level a meaningful term. And the same is true of the term "circle" in this context.

But what if we were to add that the concept of a square circle is not contradictory from God's perspective and thus that to him it is meaningful. Would this clarify anything? This certainly tells us something about God: that he is able to think in other than human categories. But it would not make the concept any more meaningful to us. Given the categories of meaning with which we seem to have been created, the concept would remain just as meaningless from our perspective as before. From: David Bassinger, "Biblical Paradox: Does Revelation Challenge Logic?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 2 (1987): 208.

Therefore, a construction of theology that holds that truth can come in terms of apparent contradiction is self-defeating. The terms or concepts in such a system are ultimately undefinable.

A fourth problem associated with this position is that it makes the offense of Christianity the offense that it is irrational rather than the ethical implications of the cross of Christ. The gospel proclaims to men that they are sinners in need of a Savior and that Christ is the only way to salvation. This message is an offense to fallen man. If it is held that the truth claims of Christianity come in the form of contradictories, even if they are only apparent contradictories, then the offense of Christianity is that it is irrational. It proclaims to men that they are rational and must become irrational in order to embrace Christianity.

It should be noted that the Bible does use paradoxes in their strict literary sense (understood as apparent, but reconcilable contradictories). They are used as a literary device to intensify interest and create reflection and thought in the reader. In this regard, he used paradoxes in literature for the same reasons men use them. However, this does not mean that after all interpretive work is complete and correct that the reader will be left with a theological system that comes to

him as seeming contradictory constructs. Usually, the doctrines that are presented as having apparent antinomies are the foundational doctrines of the faith such as the Trinity, the person of Christ, and God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Therefore, it is said that when these doctrines are presented correctly, they must be proclaimed as contradictory constructs. Robert Reymond elaborates on this idea:

Now I readily concede that it is possible for an erring exegete so to interpret two statements of Scripture that he *thinks* that they teach contradictory propositions. But I totally reject the idea that he will have interpreted the statements correctly. Either he misinterpreted one statement (maybe both) or he tried to relate two statements, given their specific contexts, which were never intended to be related to one another. To affirm otherwise, that is, to affirm that Scripture statements, when properly interpreted, can teach that which for the human existent is both irreconcilably contradictory and yet still true, is to make Christianity and the propositional revelation upon which it is based for its teaching irrational, and strikes at the rational nature of God who speaks throughout its pages. God is Truth itself, Christ is the Logos of God, neither can lie, what they say is self-consistent and non-contradictory, and none of this is altered in the revelatory process. It does the cause of Christ no good, indeed, only positive harm results, when the core teachings of Scripture are portrayed by Christ's friends, not only to the non-believing mind but even to the Christian mind, as at heart a 'precious list of contradictories.' From: Robert L. Reymond, *Preach The Word!* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1988), 32.

A good example of this issue is the doctrine of the Trinity. It is often said that the doctrine of the Trinity is an apparent paradox. This so-called paradox of the Trinity affirms that three equals one and one equals three. However, if the same numerical adjectives were used to describe the same noun so that the doctrine of the Trinity is framed as one God equals three Gods or three Gods equal one God, then that is not an apparent contradiction, but a real one. However, no orthodox creed or confession of faith has ever presented the doctrine in that way. All the historic creeds have been careful to avoid

the appearance of contradiction by using the noun, "God" or "Godhead," with the numeral "one" and another noun, "persons," with the numeral "three." For example the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity. . ." (II, iii). (Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 109.)

Cornelius Van Til, however, in his accepting of apparent contradictions, writes this concerning the Trinity:

God is one-conscious being, and yet he is a three-conscious being. . . the work ascribed to any of the persons is the work of the one absolute person. . . . It is sometimes asserted that we can prove to men that we are not asserting anything that they ought to consider irrational, inasmuch as we say that God is one in essence and three in person. We therefore claim that we have not asserted unity and trinity of exactly the same thing.

Yet this is not the whole truth of the matter. We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person. . . within the ontological Trinity we must maintain that God is numerically one. He is one person. . . . Yet, within the being of the one person we are permitted and compelled by Scripture to make the distinction between a specific generic type of being, and three personal subsistences. From: Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 220, 228, 229-230.

Here is an incredible statement of contradiction. Van Til not only writes in contradictory terms, but also frames the Trinity differently from the historic orthodox creeds and confessions. Properly understood, the doctrine of the Trinity does not present an apparent contradiction or a real one. The Trinity represents the complexity of the Godhead, but not a contradiction.

Similarly, the doctrine of the two persons of Christ does not affirm that Christ is one person and two persons or one nature and two natures at the same time and the same relationship. From Chaceldon on, the church has declared that Christ is one person with two natures. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 21 states: "The only redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever."

C. An important application of this is that we are called to have a worldview that corresponds to God's perspective.

See: Titus 1:1-2.

Notice that Paul, in his opening salutation, addresses the issue of knowing the truth that leads to godliness which is based on the promise of eternal life. Paul's letter to Titus stresses the idea that sound doctrine goes hand in hand with godliness and sanctification.

When Paul is talking about the qualifications for eldership he emphasizes this idea - Titus 1:9-14. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul mentions the idea of the truth that leads to godliness in the opening salutation of the letter.

He is making plain that there is a foundation of truth upon which our faith stands and that truth leads us, not only to salvation through faith in Jesus, but also to a godly life.

See: Titus 2:11-15.

Christian behavior, character, ethics, and the content of faith are all built upon the foundation of the truth of God's Word. The truthfulness of God's Word to us is based upon God's character - he does not lie. Titus 1:2.

When we talk about truth in a Christian context, we are talking about objective truth. In western culture, truth has become almost completely subjective. For example, how many times have you heard someone say, "It may be right for you and that's fine, but it's not right for me." In other words, there is no ultimate, final truth for behavior or for viewing the world. The Christian concept of truth is a "correspondence view of truth." What do we mean by that? We mean that truth corresponds to reality as perceived by God. Therefore, it is objective, final, and ultimate truth. A truth that exists apart from my feelings.

D. Finally, the Christian life is to be built on God's revelation and not on feelings.

R. C. Sproul, in his book, *Knowing Scripture*, writes "I have often been tempted to write a book by the title *The Sensuous Christian. The Sensuous Woman, The Sensuous Man, The Sensuous Couple, The Sensuous Divorcee, ad nauseam*, all have become best sellers, Why not *The Sensuous Christian*? What is a sensuous Christian? One dictionary defines "sensuous" as, "pertaining to the senses or sensible objects: highly susceptible to influence through the senses." The sensuous Christian is one who lives by

his feelings rather than through his understanding of the Word of God. The sensuous Christian cannot be moved to service, prayer or study unless he 'feels like it.' His Christian life is only as effective as the intensity of present feelings. When he experiences spiritual euphoria, he is a whirlwind of godly activity; when he is depressed, he is a spiritual incompetent. He constantly seeks new and fresh spiritual experiences and uses them to determine the Word of God. His 'inner feelings' become the ultimate test of truth. The sensuous Christian doesn't need to study the Word of God because he already knows the will of God by his feelings. He doesn't want to know God; he wants to experience him. The sensuous Christian equates 'childlike faith' with ignorance. He thinks that when the Bible calls us to childlike faith it means a faith without content, a faith without understanding. He doesn't know that the Bible says, 'In evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature' (1 Cor. 14:20)." (p.27).