

WCF 02: OF GOD, AND OF THE HOLY TRINITY

The Westminster Confession of Faith is a doctrinal statement of faith that summarizes what we are to believe concerning God and what duties He requires of us. Why then does it begin with a doctrine of the Scripture rather than a doctrine of God? The answer is really very simple: namely that God has chosen to reveal Himself to us largely through the Scriptures. Nature reveals something about God to us too, but it is too general for us to know Him sufficiently to enjoy a relationship of mutual love with Him. Thus it is essential for us to know God's Word before we know God. By His Word, we learn that the God we worship differs so drastically from the gods of man's imagination, or the gods of men who refuse to believe the Scripture, that we cannot agree with ecumenists who say that all religions point to the same God. The God of the Bible is not the same as the god of Islam or modern Judaism, which refuses to accept the New Testament as the Word of God. Neither is He the same as the gods of polytheistic religions such as Hinduism or even Mormonism. Neither is He the god of Liberals or Unitarians who reject the doctrine of the Trinity. The God of the Bible is the alone Living and True God. He is personal, triune, transcendent, sovereign and loving. This is the God we worship and confess. This is the God who is introduced and affirmed in this chapter of our Confession of Faith.

The Nature of God

2.1 *There is but one only¹ living, and true God,² who is infinite in being and perfection,³ a most pure Spirit,⁴ invisible,⁵ without body, parts,⁶ or passions;⁷ immutable,⁸ immense,⁹ eternal,¹⁰ incomprehensible,¹¹ almighty,¹² most wise,¹³ most holy,¹⁴ most free,¹⁵ most absolute;¹⁶ working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will,¹⁷ for His own glory;¹⁸ most loving,¹⁹ gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;²⁰ the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him;²¹ and withal most just, and terrible in His judgments;²² hating all sin,²³ and who will by no means clear the guilty.²⁴*

¹ Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4, 6; ² 1 Thes 1:9; Jer 10:10; ³ Job 11:7-9; 26:14; ⁴ Jn 4:24; ⁵ 1 Tim 1:17; ⁶ Deut 4:15-16; Jn 4:24; Lk 24:39; ⁷ Acts 14:11, 15; ⁸ Jas 1:17; Mal 3:6; ⁹ 1 Kgs 8:27; Jer 23:23-24; ¹⁰ Ps 90:2; 1 Tim 1:17; ¹¹ Ps 145:3; ¹² Gen 17:1; Rev 4:8; ¹³ Rom 16:27; ¹⁴ Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8; ¹⁵ Ps 115:3; ¹⁶ Ex 3:14; ¹⁷ Eph 1:11; ¹⁸ Prov 16:4; Rom 11:36; ¹⁹ 1 Jn 4:8, 16; ²⁰ Ex 34:6-7; ²¹ Heb 11:6; ²² Neh 9:32-33; ²³ Ps 5:5-6; ²⁴ Neh 1:2-3; Ex 34:7.

- **There is but one only, living, and true God.**
 - (a) There is only one God: monotheism, not polytheism, tritheism, pantheism, panethism or atheism.
 - (b) He is the only Living God. Idols of wood and stone are dead (Ps 115:4-7).
 - (c) He is the only True God. All gods of human (and satanic) invention are false (1 Cor 10:20; Jer 10:10-15).
- **God is a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions:**
 - (a) God is not like man having a body: He is therefore invisible and immaterial. When fingers, eyes, ears, etc., are ascribed to God, they are to be taken *anthropomorphically*.
 - (b) God is without parts unlike man which is constituted of body and soul. God is one, so there is no inconsistency of purpose or will within the Godhead.
 - (c) God is without passions or human emotions. When God is said to grieve, to be full of fury and revenge, or to be jealous, or even delighted, these are *anthropopathic* expressions. We may indeed speak of God being grieved, but we must not imagine that He is grieved because He made a mistake or that He was not in sovereign control or that He had not foreseen what was going to happen. Neither should we speak of God desiring the salvation of the reprobate because He has decreed their reprobation.
- **Communicable & Incommunicable Attributes.** God may be apprehended by examining His Incommunicable and Communicable attributes.
 - (a) *Incommunicable* attributes are:
 - i. His Infinity;
 - ii. His Eternality, self-existence or aseity;

- iii. His Unchangeableness or Immutability;
- (b) His *communicable* attributes are the attributes that man created in His image are granted possession of to a degree, such as wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

WSC 4 What is God?

A. God is a spirit,

infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being,

⇔ Incommunicable attributes

wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

⇔ Communicable attributes

- **God is infinite in being and perfection:** He is infinite in His being (or essence or existence). He is infinite in His perfection (or moral, communicable attributes).
- **He is infinite in being.** This means He is unbounded and unlimited in His being or essence, which means He is:
 - (a) **Immense**—God is so great that the universe cannot contain Him, i.e., He is not bounded by space: He is transcendent (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27).
 - (b) **Eternal**—God is not bounded by time: He has no beginning and no end (cf. Ps 90:2; 9:7; 2 Pet 3:8).
 - (c) **Incomprehensible**—finite beings cannot fully comprehend Him apart from what He has chosen to reveal of Himself (cf. Job 11:7).
 - (d) **Omnipresent**—God is in all of space, i.e. everywhere present: He is immanent (Not as the pantheist who says God is space and space is God).
- **God is immutable:** He does not change in His being nor purpose (Num 23:19; Ps 33:11; Mal 3:6). He introduced Himself as “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex 3:14), which also mean “I will be that I will be.” Neither does God increase or decrease in glory or blessedness.
- **God is almighty:** He is infinitely powerful or omnipotent. “With God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26). He is not only the Creator but Sustainer of the world. “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Prov 16:4).
- **God is most wise:** God’s wisdom is infinite. Thus He directs all things which He created to their proper end, namely His own glory. “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches” (Ps 104:24).
- **God is most holy:** He is infinitely holy. He is transcendently holy (see Isa 6:3; Hab 1:13). So God hates sin and is angry with the wicked everyday.
- **God is most free:** He does whatever He pleases after His own counsel (Ps 115:3; Eph 1:11). He is not affected by anything external to Him. Thus He works “*all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory.*” Though He hears and answers prayers, prayers do not change His mind.
- **God is most absolute:** As the “I AM” (Ex 3:14), He is the perfect Being. He is not only immutable, but perfect in every sense of the word.
- **God is infinitely good:** He is “*most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.*” His goodness can be seen *absolutely*—i.e., as it is in Himself; or *relatively*—as it is exercised towards His creatures. Relatively, it may also be considered as *general* and *special*. If viewed as general, then the recipients of His goodness are all His creatures (cf. Ps 36:6–7; 145:9; Mt 5:45). Though commonly known as “common grace,” it is better designated temporal-benevolence because whatever good that a reprobate receives in this life will add to his damnation at the judgment. If viewed as special, then the recipients of God’s goodness are the elect in Christ (Ps 73:1; Eph 1:5–6). There is forgiveness only in Christ.

- **God is *most just*:** So He will punish sin. He is “*the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.*”

The Nature of God Elaborated

2.2 *God hath all life,¹ glory,² goodness,³ blessedness,⁴ in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made,⁵ nor deriving any glory from them,⁶ but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them: He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things;⁷ and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever Himself pleaseth.⁸ In His sight all things are open and manifest,⁹ His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature,¹⁰ so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain.¹¹ He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands.¹² To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.¹³*

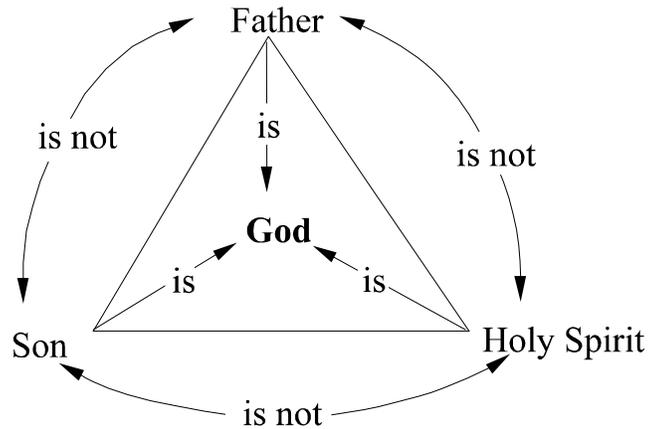
¹ Jn 5:26; ² Acts 7:2; ³ Ps 119:68; ⁴ 1 Tim 6:15; Rom 9:5; ⁵ Acts 17:24–25; ⁶ Job 22:2–3; ⁷ Rom 11:36; ⁸ Rev 4:11; 1 Tim 6:15; Dan 4:25, 35; ⁹ Heb 4:13; ¹⁰ Rom 11:33–34; Ps 147:5; ¹¹ Acts 15:18; Ezk 11:5; ¹² Ps 145:17; Rom 7:12; ¹³ Rev 5:12–14.

- **God is wholly self-sufficient.** He hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself: He is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He has no need for any created thing. He has life in and of Himself unlike man who is totally dependent on God for his being and life. He is infinitely and perfectly glorious and no one can add to His glory. When man is said to glorify him it is but to show forth his glory. He is good in and of himself, and His goodness is not dependant on perception or judgement of the objects of His benevolence. And He is altogether blessed in and of himself, nothing and no one can add to His blessedness. He did not create to make himself happier or to fulfil a need.
- **God is the *alone fountain of all being*:** He is the source of all existence and life, for “in him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28a; cf. Rom 11:36; 1Tim 6:13).
- **God is sovereign.** He hath most sovereign dominion over [every creature], to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever Himself pleaseth. God’s creatures, whether angels, men, animals or inanimate objects do not and cannot live or move independently from God. He does not only give them existence and life, He sustains their life and determine all their motions and changes.
- **God’s knowledge and understanding is infinite.** In His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain. He is all-knowing or omniscient. Nothing adds to his knowledge. Nothing is hid from Him—even if it is future. There is no such thing as chance or luck. God is never surprised. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18; cf. Heb 4:13; Rom 11:33–34; Ps 147:5; Ezk 11:5). This is so because it is God who ordains all things that comes to pass.
- **God is the standard of rightness and holiness.** He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. All things that comes to past, including the unholy and wicked deeds of his moral creature, and natural disasters are determined by His sovereign will. Yet God is always right and holy. He is not the author of sin. All He does is holy. All He commands is holy.
- **God is alone is worthy of all praise and honour.** To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, He is pleased to require of them. To worship is to ascribe worthiness. Man and angels must worship God with a moral consciousness. All other creatures are made to ascribe glory to their Creature according to their nature (cf. Rev 5:12-14).

The Trinity of God

2.3 In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.¹ the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;² the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.³

¹ 1 Jn 5:7; Mt 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; ² Jn 1:14, 18; ³ Jn 15:26; Gal 4:6.



- **The Father is God.** There are numerous passages in the Old Testament that speaks of God as the Father (e.g. Isa 63:16; 64:8), but these may not be referring specific to the first person in the Trinity. However, in the New Testament, there are numerous reference to “God the Father” in distinction to Christ the Son (eg. Rom 1:7; 15:6; 1 Cor 1:3; 8:6; 15:24; 2Cor 1:2, 3; 11:31; Gal 1:1, 3; 2 Jn 1:9; Jude 1:1). These verses clearly speaks of a distinct person within the God, especially when we see that Christ the Son is God in our next point. In fact, in His high priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ addresses Him as “Father” (Jn 17:1) and “the only true God” (Jn 17:3). So the Father is God.
- **The Son is God:**
 - (a) He has divine attributes: (i) Eternality (1Jn 1:2; Heb 1:2–3; Jn 17:5; 1:1); (ii) Omniscience (e.g., Mt 16:8; 22:18; Mk 2:8; Lk 5:22; Rev 2:18, 23); (iii) Omnipresence (e.g., Mt 18:20; 28:20); (iv) Omnipotence (e.g., Mt 28:18).
 - (b) He has divine titles, such as “the mighty God, The everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6), “Immanuel” (Isa 7:14), “JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6); “KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:16).
 - (c) He has divine works and offices: (i) creation (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2); (ii) providence (Heb 1:3); (iii) judgment (Jn 5:22, 9:39; Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10); (iv) forgiveness of sin (Mt 9:6).
 - (d) He is identified with Jehovah as the stone of stumbling or rock of offence (Isa 8:13–14; cf. Rom 9:32–33; 1 Pet 2:8).
 - (e) He received Thomas’ worship (Jn 20:28; cf. Acts 10:25–26; Rev 22:8–9).
 - (f) He identified Himself as the Son of God, so making Himself equal with God (see John 5:18).
 - (g) He identified Himself as the “I am” (see John 8:58; 18:6).
 - (h) Other clear NT references: e.g., “Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5); “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16); “...Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God...” (Phil 2:5–6); “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9); “This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 Jn 5:20); and “...the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

- **The Holy Spirit is God:**
 - (a) He has divine attributes: (i) Eternality (Heb 9:14); (ii) Omnipresence (Ps 139:7–8); (iii) Omniscience (1 Cor 2:10–11); (iv) Omnipotence (Lk 1:35a); (v) Sovereignty (1 Cor 12:11).
 - (b) He has divine works and offices: (i) creation (Gen 1:2; Job 33:4); (ii) directing missions (Acts 16:7); (iii) regeneration and sanctification (Tit 3:5); (iv) miracles (Mt 12:28); (v) bestowing wisdom and illumination (1 Cor 2:10–16); (vi) inspiring the Scripture (2 Pet 1:21); (vii) resurrection (Rom 8:11).
 - (c) He is ascribed equality with God, e.g., we are the temple of God because His Spirit indwells us (1 Cor 3:16) and Peter rebuking Ananias for lying against the Holy Spirit declared that his sin was “not ... unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:3–4).
- **The Holy Spirit is a Person not a force.**
 - (a) He is called the Comforter not a comfort (Jn 14:26, 15:26, 16:7).
 - (b) The NT, despite grammatical inconsistency, frequently makes use of masculine pronouns for the Holy Spirit although ‘spirit’ (Gk. *pneuma*) is neuter in the Greek (1 Cor 2:10–11; Jn 16:13).
 - (c) He possesses attributes of a Person: (i) He has a mind (Jn 14:26; Rom 8:27); (ii) He works according to His own will (Acts 16:7; 1 Cor 12:11); (iii) He can be grieved (Eph 4:30); (iv) He can be vexed (Isa 63:10); (v) He can be tested (Acts 5:9); (vi) He can be lied to (Acts 5:3); (vii) He can be blasphemed (Mt 12:31).
 - (d) He performs works of a Person: (i) He creates and gives life (Job 33:4); (ii) He appoints and commissions ministers (Isa 48:16; Acts 13:2; 20:28); (iii) He directs ministers where and what to preach (Acts 8:29; 10:19–20, etc.); (iv) He spoke in, and by, the prophets (Acts 1:16; 1 Pet 1:11–12; 2 Pet 1:21); (v) He strives with sinners (Gen 6:3); (vi) He reproves (Jn 16:8); (vii) He comforts (Acts 9:31); (viii) He helps our infirmities (Rom 8:26); (ix) He intercedes on our behalf (Rom 8:26); (x) He teaches (Jn 14:26; 1 Cor 12:3); (xi) He guides (Jn 16:13); (xii) He sanctifies (Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11); (xiii) He testifies of and glorifies Christ (Jn 15:26; 16:14); (xiv) He searches all things (Rom 11:33–34; 1 Cor 2:10–11).
- **The Persons in the Godhead are not only distinguishable but distinct:** If indistinct, i.e., “God appears at different times in three different modes,” then it is the heresy of Sabellian Modelism (or Monarchaism). This distinction is:
 - (a) Hinted in the Old Testament when God spoke with the plural first person personal pronoun,—“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26)— which suggests plurality of the Godhead.
 - (b) Seen very clearly at the time of Jesus’ baptism where the Son was being baptised, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and the Father spoke from heaven (Mt 3:16–17).
 - (c) Can be deduced from Scripture in that: (i) The Son is distinguished from the Father in that He, but not the Father, descended to Earth. It was not the Father who died and rose again, but His Son. (ii) The Spirit is distinguished from the Father since He “proceedeth from the Father” (Jn 15:26). (iii) The Spirit is distinguished from the Son since the Son calls Him “another Comforter” (Jn 14:16).
 - (d) Can be seen in the functional order in the Trinity as seen in the personal properties of the divine Persons: (i) God the Father *exists* of Himself (Jn 5:26); (ii) God the Son is *eternally begotten* of the Father (Jn 1:18; 3:16; Gal 4:4) and (iii) God the Holy Spirit is *eternally proceeding* from both the Father and the Son (Jn 14:26; 15:26).
- **There is unity of essence in the Godhead:** if the Persons of the Godhead have separate existence, then God would not be mono-theistic but of tri-theistic. Thus, if it can be shown that the Bible teaches that the persons of the Godhead exist separately, then it would contradict the biblical assertion that there is only one living and true God. But this is not the case; the Bible is clear that though there are three persons in the Godhead, they are one in essence, e.g.:
 - (a) 1 John 5:7, “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one”;

- (b) Matthew 28:19, "... baptising them in *the name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In the formula we see that baptism is to be made in the name (singular) of the one God who has clearly manifested Himself in the Father, Son and Spirit;
- (c) Compare Isaiah 6:5, where Isaiah saw "the King, the LORD of hosts," with John 12:41 where Isaiah is said to have seen Christ, with Acts 28:25 where He who spoke to Isaiah is noted as the Holy Spirit.

Augustine: "Christ, considered in Himself is called God; but with relation to the Father, He is called the Son. The Father, considered in Himself is called God; but with relation to the Son, He is called the Father. ... They who are severally called the Father and the Son are the same God." We may add: "The Holy Spirit, considered in Himself is called God; but with relation to the Father and the Son, He is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ."

- ***The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding:*** In the Scriptures, we find that the Father, unlike the Son is never spoken of as being '*begotten*', and unlike the Spirit is never spoken of as '*proceeding*.'
- ***The Son is eternally begotten of the Father:*** This is the doctrine of *filiation*. The Scriptures speaks of Christ as being "the only begotten Son" (e.g. Jn 1:18; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:1-3). This description,—together with the facts that (1) Christ is eternal and pre-existent (Jn 1:1); and (2) Christ himself declared: "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (Jn 5:26),—shows that we must think of Christ as being *eternally* begotten.
- ***The Holy Ghost [is] eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son:*** This is the doctrine of *spiration*. In the first place, the word 'Spirit' (רוּחַ in the OT and *pneu`ma* in the NT) when used in a genitive construct with God or the Lord (Spirit of God, or Spirit of the Lord), suggest a breath proceeding from God or the Lord. In the second place, the Lord describes the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of truth, which proceedeth [lit. is proceeding] from the Father" (Jn 15:26). In the third place, the Holy Spirit, is known in the Scriptures as "Spirit of [God's] Son" (Gal 4:6) and "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9, 1 Pet 1:11), which suggests quite strongly that the Spirit does not only proceed from the Father, but also the Son.