

The Doctrine of God and the Holy Trinity
Doctrine 2

I. Introduction

A. The 21st century has seen an explosion of information that is unprecedented in human history.

1. Despite this massive download of information there remains one area of knowledge that is more critical than all others—the knowledge of God.
2. It should be the desire of every man, woman and child to know God.

B. Scripture teaches that God is holy and dwells in unapproachable light.

1. As one seeks to gain any knowledge of God, there must be an awareness of their complete deficiency to arrive at a correct view of God apart from His help.
2. This may sound like a dilemma, but God has bridged the gap of knowing the unknowable for us.
3. The Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesians to have such knowledge, “**to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God**” (Eph 3:19–20).

C. In this chapter, we will explore the arguments for the existence of God, consider the Fatherhood of God, the attributes of God, the names of God and the Triune nature of God.

II. Existence of God

A. Throughout human history, across geographical boundaries, cultural backgrounds and education there has been the strong belief that God exists.

1. Despite this prevalent belief in God there are those who vigorously oppose the belief in the existence of God.
2. The Bible assumes the belief in God and does not set out to prove his existence through apologetic argumentation.
3. That being said, below are some of the arguments that have been presented to answer those who reject the existence of God.
4. It should be noted that God requires faith in Him to experience a relationship with Him. Wayne Grudem believes:

The value of these proofs, then, lies chiefly in overcoming some of the intellectual objections of unbelievers. They cannot bring unbelievers to saving faith, for that comes about through belief in the testimony of Scripture. But they can help overcome objections from unbelievers, and, for believers, they can provide further intellectual evidence for something they have already been persuaded of from their own inner sense of God and from the testimony of Scripture.¹

5. Therefore, classical arguments presented to persuade those who deny the existence of God in no way disregard the necessity of faith (Heb 11:6).
6. These following four arguments have been used through the ages to present a logical defense for the existence of God.

B. Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God

1. This logical reasoning is based on the premise that “something cannot come from nothing, there must be an original cause that is the reason for the world’s existence.”²

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 144.

² Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 183.

2. The term uses the Greek word κόσμος (world).
3. The simple idea communicated in this argument is that because this κόσμος exists it must therefore have an effect, a maker (Col 1:16–17).

Colossians 1:16–17 (NKJV) ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

C. Teleological Argument for the Existence of God

1. The teleological argument for the existence of God uses the Greek word τέλος and refers to “means “end” or “goal” or “purpose.”³
2. The idea presented in this argument is that the universe has order and design and thus an intelligent designer was at work when this κόσμος was made—Creator God.
3. The world around us manifests exquisite purpose and so there must be an intelligent, purposeful, designer (Psalm 104:14–15).

Psalm 104:14–15 (NKJV) ¹⁴ He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth, ¹⁵ And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, And bread which strengthens man’s heart.

D. Ontological Argument for the Existence of God

1. The third argument in the traditional arguments for God is ontological. According to Paul Enns, “The term *ontological* comes from the Greek present participle *ontos* (from the verb *eimi*) and means ‘being’ or ‘existence.’”⁴
2. The central idea is that mankind has an awareness that God exists.

³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 143.

⁴ Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 185–184.

E. Moral Argument for the Existence of God

1. The logic of this argument is straightforward and quite accessible.
2. The argument states that **because man understands right and wrong there must be a moral law giver (Rom 2:14–15).**

Romans 2:14–15 (NKJV) ¹⁴ for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)

3. The deep belief within mankind that justice should be done when wrong has been perpetrated further looks to one “**who will someday mete out justice to all people.**”⁵
4. Because man has been created with such a strong sense of right and wrong this argument proves to be quite helpful in offering a logical explanation for the existence of God.

III. The Fatherhood of God

A. God being referred to as Father is a very familiar theme of Scripture.

1. Harold Wilmington points out that Jesus made reference to the Father over 200 times in His ministry while on earth making it His most talked about subject.⁶

B. Scripture highlights the Fatherhood of God in specific relationship to Israel, the Church, and Christ Himself.

1. Israel is recognized as the children of God but this teaching is not fully developed (Deut 1:31).

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 143.

⁶ Harold Willmington. *12 Essential Doctrines: Systematic Theology*. Forest: LHBI, 2014. 107.

Deuteronomy 1:31 (NKJV) ³¹ and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’

a) Gregory Cochran doubts “**that individuals understood the full implications of divine paternity.**”⁷

2. It would not be until the New Testament and the emphasis that Jesus places on the Fatherhood of God that this understanding would be fully realized.

a) Although God is the creator of all men (Gen 1:27) and in one sense their Father, it is only believers who enjoy the fruits of this relationship through Christ.

b) Believers are taught in the New Testament: to pray to their Father in heaven (**Mat 6:6**), wait for the promise of the Father (**Acts 1:4**), are raised from the dead by the Father (**Rom 6:4**), and should cry out to God as their Abba Father (**Rom 8:15**).

c) The depth of intimate relationship that the Church/the believer has with the Father is rich.

3. Christ, as was mentioned above, spoke of the Father more than any other subject.

a) Thus our understanding of this relationship is best understood through His teachings.

b) Wilmington cites Lewis Chafer from *Systematic Theology* as saying, “**It is probable that the terms Father and Son, as applied to the first and second person in the Godhead, are somewhat anthropomorphic in character...but wholly without implication that the two Persons, on the divine side, are not equal in every particular.**”⁸

⁷ Cochran, Gregory C. "Remembering the Father in Fatherhood: Biblical Foundations and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of the Fatherhood of God." *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 17.

⁸ Willmington, *12 Essential Doctrines*. 111.

c) Jesus, having the unique and favored relationship with the Father alone provides access to the Father (John 14:6).

John 14:6 (NKJV) ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

IV. Attributes of God

A. All that man knows of God is due to the revelation God has given to man.

Romans 3:11 (NKJV) ¹¹ *There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.*

Proverbs 30:2–4 (NLT) ² I am too stupid to be human, and I lack common sense. ³ I have not mastered human wisdom, nor do I know the Holy One. ⁴ Who but God goes up to heaven and comes back down? Who holds the wind in his fists? Who wraps up the oceans in his cloak? Who has created the whole wide world? What is his name—and his son's name? Tell me if you know!

1. The attributes of God represent some of the greatest truths God has revealed about Himself.
2. This knowledge was not given to satisfy the philosopher's or the theologian's curiosities but rather to return a wayward creature to his maker.
 - a) Any discussion on the attributes of God that does not lead people to the desired end of worship is one that has missed the mark.
3. There is not a standard system for categorizing the attributes of God among theologians.
 - a) For some this will mean they choose not to categorize whereas others will adopt varying systems.
 - b) Following Ryrie's lead, no categorization system will be adopted in the following abridged consideration of the attributes of God.

B. Transcendence

1. The attribute of transcendence or immensity is a declaration of the greatness of God.

a) **God is superior and greater than all.**

Grud. By this we mean that God is separate from and independent of nature and humanity. God is not simply attached to, or involved in, his creation. He is also superior to it in several significant ways.⁹

2. When man loses sight of the awe inspiring transcendent nature of God he can quickly become wise in his own opinion, ways and methods.

a) On this point A.W. Tozer says, “**When men no longer fear God, they transgress His laws without hesitation. The fear of consequences is not deterrent when the fear of God is gone.**”¹⁰

b) Man must always keep a high view, a transcendent view, of God.

3. Pondering the greatness of God will lead to a life that exalts God and walks humbly before Him.

a) **The prophet Isaiah speaks of the kind of person the transcendent One will commune with.**

Isaiah 57:15 “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

4. Praise the Lord for His willingness to toil with mankind, bringing him to the place of contrition that he might enjoy fellowship with Him.

C. Sovereignty of God

1. The sovereignty of God is explained by Packer as “God's dominion being total: he wills as he chooses and carries out all that he wills, and none can stay his hand or thwart his plans.”¹¹

⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 282.

¹⁰ A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy: Knowing God Through His Attributes*. (Reformed Church Publications, 2017), 1311-1313. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 46–47.

2. Although the sovereignty of God has been revealed to finite man so that we might wonder and worship, this attribute has sadly caused much wrangling in the Church—man has free will but God is absolutely sovereign.

3. Tozer offers a helpful balance to this often-disputed topic,

God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it.¹²

a) Tozer’s input will not end this theological debate but it does provide a biblical answer that acknowledges both the freedom of man to choose and the sovereign will of God to rule over the universe.

4. For the believer, the sovereignty of God should be a source of great comfort, knowing that our loving creator is in charge of all things.

D. Omnipotence

1. The Bible teaches that God is omnipotent (Rev 1:8) which means “God is all-powerful and able to do anything consistent with His own nature.”¹³

2. This is an attribute that most find easier to comprehend as compared with the transcendence or immutability of God.

a) Knowing that God is omnipotent brings great comfort and peace to the person who has yielded themselves to the rule of God over their life.

¹² Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* 2011–2014.

¹³ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 45

b) Omnipotence, as with all the attributes of God, is the occasion by which countless worship songs have been written and sung down through the ages.

3. Man's limitations should be the occasion by which he seeks the aid of the One in whom there are no limits.

a) If God were not loving man would not run to God but from Him in fear, wondering if this One who has such power will use it for evil.

b) The omnipotence of God teaches not only that God is all-powerful but that all He does is with ease.

c) God does not find parting the Red Sea any more difficult than answering the frantic prayer for assistance in helping us find our misplaced keys so we are not late to that dream job interview.

4. How wonderful to have access through faith and prayer to an all-powerful God.

E. Immutability of God

1. The immutability of God is an attribute which declares that **God never changes** (Mal 3:6; Num 23:19).

2. The spurious doctrine of process theology is dismissed when biblical understanding of the immutability of God is in place.

a) Process theology defined simply as God is changing.

b) A more thorough explanation is as follows by Matt Slick.

Process theology is the philosophical and theological position that God is changing, as is the universe. Therefore, our knowledge of God must be progressing as we learn more about him and it can never rest in any absolutes, which is why **process** theologians deny the absolutes of God's immutability and truth. Furthermore, this would mean that absolute

knowledge of God would not be achievable, and a self-revelation of God (in the person of Jesus Christ and the Bible) would also not be possible.¹⁴

3. To change is very human and it is even beneficial in many instances.

4. Man grows in understanding, abilities and morality but this aspect of development must never be applied to the Immutable One.

5. Charles Hodge beautifully captures the essence of this attribute when he writes,

So God is absolutely immutable in his essence and attributes. He can neither increase nor decrease. He is subject to no process of development, or of self-evolution. His knowledge and power can never be greater or less. He can never be wiser or holier, or more righteous or more merciful than He ever has been and ever must be. He is no less immutable in his plans and purposes. Infinite in wisdom, there can be no error in their conception; infinite in power, there can be no failure in their accomplishment. He is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17).¹⁵

6. The believer can have every confidence that the Scriptures which have come to us by way of the One who changes not, will be a constant guide in all matters of faith and practice.

7. Likewise, the God of the Scriptures will always be as He has always been.

8. God will not change His commitment to His Church and so she can rest in all that God has promised.

F. Self-Existence

1. God is a self-existing being.

2. This means He exists because of Himself and no other.

¹⁴ <https://carm.org/about-philosophy/what-is-process-theology/?highlight=process+theology>

¹⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 390.

a) All beings find their existence in another but God is not dependent on anyone other than Himself.

b) Exodus provides a biblical understanding for this attribute of God (Exo 3:14, 6:3).

Exodus 3:14 (NKJV) ¹⁴ And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

3. Jesus affirmed this attribute of God when He said, John 5:26 "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself."

G. Mercy

1. The mercy of God has been the occasion for which many prayers and thanks have been offered to God (Eph 2:4).

a) The NKJV uses the word mercy 359 times. Grudem defines mercy as "God's goodness toward those in misery and distress." ¹⁶

b) Those who are familiar with Scripture understand that mercy is an often-mentioned theme.

2. The encouraging word about the mercy of God is that this is not a posture that God takes for a while and then later decides to recall His compassion (Lam 3:22-23).

Lamentations 3:22-23 (NKJV) ²² Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

3. Mercy, like all of God's attributes, describes who He is and therefore there is no worry that God will ever stop being merciful.

4. God has made His mercy accessible through His Son Jesus and it is only in Jesus that man can find His mercy.

H. Love

1. God is love (1 John 4:8).

¹⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 200.

2. This attribute is seen the clearest in the sacrificial atonement of Jesus on the cross (1 John 4:10).

1 John 4:10 (NKJV) ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

a) Jesus declared, before going to the cross, that the greatest way to communicate love is to die for a friend (John 5:13).

b) In Jesus' death, God communicated His love for mankind in the strongest way possible.

3. Man may desire the best for those he loves yet his finitude keeps him from being able bring about that favor.

a) God, however is not limited in His ability to show love because He is also sovereign over all.

b) Tozer expresses the love of God beautifully, “His love disposes Him to desire our everlasting welfare and His sovereignty enables Him to secure it.”¹⁷

4. God is truly amazing and far beyond our ability to fully comprehend Him, but for what man can know of Him is clear—He is an Awesome God.

V. The Names of God

A. The study on the names of God is a rich and rewarding venture. In the names of God we gain further insight into the nature and ways of the Lord.

1. It is worth noting that the names of God are not the invention of men but God's own way of describing Himself.¹⁸

B. Elohim

1. Elohim is a plural form of a Hebrew word that is one of the more common words in the Old Testament.

¹⁷ Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 1800-1801.

¹⁸ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 51.

a) The Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT) states, “With 2,600 occurrences *’ēlōhîm* is the second most frequent substantive in the OT following *bēn* “son.”¹⁹

b) This name is used of the one true God as well as false deities.

c) It is usually translated as God in the English Bible and when referring to the true God it means “strong One, the mighty Leader, the supreme deity.”²⁰

d) Ryrie notes the *Elohim*, a plural form, is peculiar to the Old Testament and appears in no other Semitic language.

C. Adonai

1. The Holman Bible Dictionary records that *adonai* is used 360 times in the Old Testament and it is usually translated Lord.

2. Enns on this designation of God states that it means, “One who is sovereign in His rule and has absolute authority (cf. Ps. 8:1; Hos. 12:14).”²¹

3. This name of God communicates man’s subservient position to God who is Lord of all.

4. *Adonai* is frequently used to speak of the Lord’s transcendent nature.

D. Yahweh

1. Yahweh is the most commonly used name for God in the Old Testament.

¹⁹ Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 116.

²⁰ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 51.

²¹ Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 197.

a) Gilbrant states Yahweh is, “The personal name of the living God found 6,823 times in the Old Testament.

b) It is his redemptive, covenant-keeping name.”²²

c) Mounce adds of this name that, “It appears in every OT book except Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Esther. This name is often referred to as the Tetragrammaton because of the four (*tetra*) letters (*grammaton*) used in its Hebrew spelling.”²³

2. This name for God is noted in the modern English translation by the use of LORD and it represents the proper name of the God of Israel.

a) This name was given to Moses in Exodus 6:6 when God declared “I am the LORD” who will deliver you from Egypt.

b) The full meaning of the word is not known but according to Ryrie “the principal idea being that God was present with the people of Israel.”²⁴

VI. The Trinity of God

A. One of the great mysteries of Christian theology is the doctrine of the Trinity.

1. According to Matt Slick of Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, this doctrine teaches us that we worship a God who, “exists as a unity of three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of the persons is distinct from the other yet identical in essence.”²⁵

²² Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., “3176,” in *The Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary – Heth-Yodh*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1998), Under: “3176”.

²³ William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 421.

²⁴ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 53.

²⁵ Matt Slick, “Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry,” Matt Slick, October 23, 2017, section goes here, accessed October 23, 2017, <https://carm.org/what-is-the-trinity.www>.

2. So although this knowledge of the nature of God goes beyond man's ability to fully comprehend its depth, it in no way diminishes the truthfulness of such a teaching.

3. H.B. Smith provides a guiding definition of the Trinity for the Church as **“that in one divine essence or nature there are three Persons, distinguished from each other by certain characteristics, and indivisibly participating in that one nature.”**²⁶

B. God is One in Regard to Essence

1. The Godhead is completely united in the essence they share.

a) Essence should be understood as the, **“Formal existence; that which makes any thing to be what it is; or rather, the peculiar nature of a thing; the very substance.”**²⁷

b) Enns writes of the oneness of God that, **“all three Persons possess the summation of the divine attributes but yet the essence of God is undivided.”**²⁸

c) The Bible is very clear in emphasizing the oneness of God (Deut 6:4, Jam 2:19).

**Deuteronomy 6:4 (NKJV) ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!
James 2:19 (NKJV) ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!**

d) The teaching of the oneness of essence emphasizes that the same attributes are equal among the Father, Son and Spirit.

e) It also argues that they are one in purpose and cannot be divided (John 5:19).

²⁶ Rev. H. B. Smith, “The Trinity,”: *Bibliotheca Sacra* 003, no. 12 (Nov 1846), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: 761.

²⁷ <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/essence>

²⁸ Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 199.

2. It is around this point of essence that the Arian controversy was centered.

a) Arius taught that Jesus shared a similar nature (ὁμοιούσιος) to God but rejected that Jesus was of the same nature (ὁμοούσιος).

b) Grudem says of Arius that, “Arius was happy to say that Christ was a supernatural heavenly being and that he was created by God before the creation of the rest of the universe, and even that he was “similar” to God in his nature.”²⁹

3. In any attempt to rightly understand the teaching of the Bible on the nature of God we must cling to this first element of the Trinity of God— He is one in essence, of the same nature.

C. God is Three in Respect to Persons

1. This next major element in building a proper understanding of the Trinity is to understand that God is three with regard to persons.

2. When we speak of persons we typically understand this to mean each person has an individual essence distinct from another person.

3. Thus the Trinity teaches us that God is one in essence but also distinct in persons having personal relations to one another (Matt 3:16).

Matthew 3:16 (NKJV) ¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

D. The Three Persons Have Distinct Relationships

1. In Scripture, it is apparent that a certain order exists within the Godhead and different functions are noted.

²⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 244.

2. Berkhof writes of this order and adds an important clarifier, “**In personal subsistence the Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third. It need hardly be stated that this order does not pertain to any priority of time or of essential dignity, but only to the logical order of derivation.**”³⁰

E. The Three Persons are Equal in Authority

1. While we make certain observations about the function and order of the Trinity one should be careful to draw one conclusion about these distinctions of relationship.
2. While we may readily accept the Son submitting to the Father (John 8:29) or the Spirit being sent (John 14:26) these statements in no way are assigning greater authority to one person over the other.

VII. Conclusion

A. No expenditure of time could be less fruitful than seeking to know God apart from His revelation of Himself.

B. Having such a revelation, it is no understatement to declare that the most worthy use of one’s time and mental faculties is the pursuit of knowing God.

C. How blessed man is to have a Maker who desires to be known by His Creation and is immanent.

D. Our focus in this study has been on the theology proper.

1. In this pursuit consideration was given to the arguments for the existence of God, the Fatherhood of God, the attributes of God, the names of God and the Triune nature of God.

E. It is my prayer that this brief study on the greatness of God will result in awe and worship.

³⁰ Ibid., 88–89.