

TEACHING THROUGH THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 2: Of God, and of the Holy Trinity

LESSON 004

TEACHER NOTES

REVIEW FROM PREVIOUS LESSON

God's Word is completely sufficient for everything Christians need to know about salvation and faith. The central, saving truths of Scripture are clear enough for ordinary believers to understand through diligent study, aided by the Holy Spirit's illumination. The Bible stands as the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice and so it must be translated into common languages so all people can access it. Scripture itself should interpret scripture rather than by human traditions, feelings, or external authorities.

The Nature and Attributes of God

TEACHING NOTE

The Shorter Catechism Q3 tells us that “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man,” and here we find centuries of God's self revelation summarized in an almost overwhelming list. We see who God is, what He does, what He has done for us, and what He will do on the judgment day. The catechism gives its own summary of it all in Q4: “What is God? A Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” The main and most important thing for us to comprehend is that God is God and not a man, and not merely that He is holy where we are sinful, but that He is of an entirely different order of being. He is infinite, eternal, and unchanging; we are finite, fleeting, and dependent.

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:6–7

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH 2.1

1. There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; 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.

TEACHING CONTENT

One Living and True God: There is only one God. There are many false gods, but our God, in stark contrast to them, is both living and true. In other words, He is not a figment of men's imaginations and therefore a dead and lifeless thing, but is truly God with all the power and authority that goes along with it. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9)

A Most Pure Spirit: God, in and of Himself, does not have a body. The confession points out how big of a difference this is by saying that God is 'invisible, without body, parts, or passions,' meaning that as a spirit God is simple. Not that He is easy for us to comprehend, but that He is not assembled out of parts. His nature and His character are in perfect unity and communion with each other in a way that we can't comprehend. (John 4:24)

Immutable, Eternal, and Incomprehensible: God is absolute and unchanging. What He is He always will be; at no point will He change His mind or His character. He has always existed, before time itself and before all created things and beings. As the creator, everything that He creates is, by utter necessity, less than Him to such an extent that we cannot understand Him unless He reveals Himself to us. (Malachi 3:6; Psalm 90:2; Romans 11:33–36)

Almighty, Most Free, Most Absolute: God is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, which means that He is not influenced, bound by, or circumscribed by His creation. Everything that He does, He does because He desired to do so from eternity past. None of His decisions are in response to anything that has happened, but all of time and creation are working out according to the plan that He made before He created anything. (Ephesians 1:11; Revelation 1:8)

Goodness and Justice Together: For us, an inherent part of the character and nature of God is how He relates to His creation. He has revealed Himself to be completely Good and completely Just. He forgives, rewards, and blesses the elect according to His merciful will and condemns and hates all wickedness according to His wrath and justice. These are not contradictory but two expressions of the very same character of God—which is why, when God revealed His glory to Moses, He named His goodness and His justice in the same breath. (Exodus 34:6–7)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **The confession calls God “incomprehensible.” Does that bother you or comfort you?**

There's no wrong answer here, but the goal is to land on comfort. Incomprehensible doesn't mean unknowable (we can truly know God because He has revealed Himself) it means we can never exhaust Him. A God small enough to fully fit in our heads wouldn't be worth worshipping, this should be frustrating and comforting.

- **In a person, doing everything “for his own glory” would be arrogant. Why is it good when God does it?**

The difference is that God deserves the glory and we don't. For God to point us to anything less than Himself would actually be a lie and unloving, since nothing else is worthy of that glory and nothing else can satisfy us.

- **We tend to picture God's love and His anger as two separate moods. If God doesn't change, where does His anger actually come from?**

Not from a mood that flares up, but from His unchanging holiness meeting sin. Because God is "simple" (without parts), His love and His wrath aren't two competing feelings, they're the same steady commitment to what is good, seen from two sides. The God who loves what is good necessarily opposes evil. His anger is constant and principled, not reactive like ours.

- **If a friend told you, "I could never worship a God who 'will by no means clear the guilty,'" how would you respond?**

Gently flip their perspective: a judge who did clear the guilty, who shrugged at abuse, injustice, evil, wouldn't be good; he'd be corrupt.

- **We often pray like we're trying to change God's mind. If God already planned everything, what is prayer for?**

God ordains the ends and the means. Prayer is one of the means He uses to accomplish what He planned. Prayer doesn't inform or pressure God to do something He doesn't want to; it's how He invites us to participate in His work and aligns us with His will. We're not changing His mind; He's changing us, and genuinely working through our asking (James 5:16–18).

- **When you sin, which comes to mind first: that God forgives, or that God judges? Why?**

No wrong answer, but point to the entirety of the gospel. Grace is only amazing because of the reality of sin and judgment. One without the other is a meaningless, dead faith.

God's Independence and Authority

TEACHING NOTE

If 2.1 told us what God is, 2.2 shows us the key differences between the Creator and the creature. God is God and we are not. He doesn't need us but we are completely and entirely dependent upon Him. This is what theologians call His aseity, His life is from Himself alone, while every creature, from an angel to an atom, depends on Him for its existence moment by moment. Because He needs nothing, His sovereignty over all things is complete and nothing in His creation can surprise Him or escape His knowledge. He is who He is and does what He does and as a result we are obligated to love and obey Him on His terms, not ours. Far from being cold, this is our comfort: a God who needed us could never be our refuge and strength, and a God who could be caught off guard could not keep us.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH 2.2

2. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and 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 is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. 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 most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, he is pleased to require of them.

TEACHING CONTENT

Aseity and Self-Sufficiency: God is God. He is unlike any of His creatures in that He has always existed and is in need of nothing from anyone. Everything in all creation from the greatest to the least is completely dependent upon God for its existence, but God is dependent upon nothing outside of Himself. He exists apart from everything, He sustains Himself without any help. (Job 22:2–3; Acts 17:24–25)

Sovereignty: Because God is the fountain of all being, He has the supreme, unquestioned right to command and direct all His creation according to the pleasure of His own will. As the potter directs the clay and as the king directs his subjects, so God directs all creation. God has the inherent right to do this and the power to bring about His perfect will. (Daniel 4:35; Romans 11:36)

Omniscience: God knows all things completely, fully, and truly. His knowledge is perfect, infinite, and entirely independent of His creatures. Because of this, God never learns anything new, forgets anything old, or guesses at what the future might hold. Nothing is ever “contingent or uncertain” to Him, meaning that the entirety of history is completely and infallibly known to Him at all times. (Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 147:5)

Our Duty to God: Because God is the sovereign Creator we owe Him everything. He has the right to command our thoughts, words, and deeds and so we have the duty to seek to please Him in all things. We do not get to dictate or negotiate the terms of our relationship with Him. Whatever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require from us, we must give joyfully and to the best of our ability. (Revelation 4:11; Psalm 95:6)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **What makes God different from creatures?**

God is over and above creation. Every created thing from the mightiest angel to the tiniest atom, depends completely on God for existence. He depends upon no one and nothing outside of Himself. We are created and derived from Him, so the difference is not merely one of degree but of kind. He is the fountain and we are the stream.

- **Many people are uncomfortable with the idea of a God who has absolute, unchallengeable control to do “whatsoever himself pleaseth.” Why is God’s absolute sovereignty actually a massive comfort to the believer?**

Because the alternative isn’t freedom, it’s chaos. If God did not have the authority and control “to do whatsoever himself pleaseth,” then something else would. A God who governs every detail is a God who can guarantee that all things work together for our good (Rom 8:28). Sovereignty we can’t override is the only thing strong enough to actually keep us.

- **The Confession says that to God, nothing is “contingent or uncertain.” How should this reality change the way we pray and process our anxieties about the future?**

It frees us from thinking the outcome depends on us praying correctly or enough. We pray not to tell God something He doesn’t already know or sway a wavering plan, but to cast our cares on the One who has the whole of it firmly in hand. God hears and answers our prayers, but God uses our prayers as part of His eternal plan, rather than His plan depending upon our prayers.

- **If a friend told you, “I think God just wants me to be a good person; He doesn’t care exactly how I worship or serve Him,” how does the confession challenge that perspective?**

God sets the terms, not us. God has commanded us to worship and obey Him with specific rules and regulations as well as a particular frame of mind and state of heart. All we can do, if we would seek to please Him, is submit willingly and joyfully.

The Trinity

TEACHING NOTE

Having confessed who God is (2.1) and that He depends on nothing outside Himself (2.2), the Confession now tells us how this one God exists: as three persons. This is the most distinctly Christian thing we say about God, and the hardest. Notice the Confession does not try to explain the Trinity or offer an analogy to make it easy; it simply states the boundaries inside which we must speak: one God, three persons, fully equal, eternally distinct. We are not solving a riddle but confessing a mystery that is true, right, good, and glorious.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH 2.3

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: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

TEACHING CONTENT

One in Three: God is one. We do not serve three Gods, but one God in three persons. It is important that the unity of God comes first, He is one undivided divine substance, not three separate Gods who have come together. Yet, God in His oneness has eternally existed as three persons in far greater unity and harmony than we could ever comprehend. This is a mystery beyond our ability to truly grasp because it belongs to the nature of God, and there is no parallel anywhere in creation. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)

Equal: In reference to their divinity, the three persons are not greater or lesser, earlier or later, more or less God. All are fully and completely and equally God. The Athanasian Creed makes this point at length, but it can be summarized with this quote “And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.” (John 1:1; John 10:30; Acts 5:3–4; Hebrews 1:3)

Distinct Persons: God is one God in three distinct persons. What distinguishes them is not their Godhood but their internal eternal relation to each other. The Father is “of none,” He is neither begotten nor proceeding. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father, which does not mean He had a beginning, but that He has always been the Son, eternally from the Father. The Holy Ghost eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. These relations are eternal and unchanging; there was never a time the Father was without the Son or the Spirit. This too is a mystery beyond our comprehension and we should be very careful what language and words we use to speak of these things. (John 1:14, 18; John 15:26; Galatians 4:6)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **The Holy Spirit is a He not an it. Why is it so important for our faith to remember that the Spirit is a person and not just ‘a force’?**

A force is something you harness; a person is someone you know. If you don’t acknowledge the personhood of the Spirit you don’t understand or know God. Moreover, having the power of the Holy Spirit means being in an active relationship with God, not merely having certain spiritual gifts.

- **Why would analogies for the Trinity be dangerous for us?**

Every analogy breaks down into a heresy. Some mysteries are guarded better by precise words than by illustrations.

- **If someone said, “Father, Son, and Spirit are just three jobs the one God does—Creator, Savior, Helper,” what’s wrong with that, and why does it matter?**

That is the heresy of modalism, where God is one and acts as three roles rather than being one in three. It matters because if the Son is not truly distinct from the Father, then there is no one to send, no one to obey, no real love between persons in God, and the cross becomes incoherent.

- **How does the Trinity actually shape the way we pray and worship?**

We come to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. All of our worship of God rightly worships God as Trinity with praise for His nature, character and deeds.

References — Chapter 2

– Monergism, *WCF Study Guide 2.1-2 - Who Is God?*
www.monergism.com/who-god-wcf-21

– Monergism, *WCF Study Guide 2.3 - The Holy Trinity*
www.monergism.com/holy-trinity-wcf-23

Glossary — Chapter 2

Absolute —God is most absolute in that He depends upon nothing outside Himself and is bound by nothing but His own perfect nature. He is not conditioned, limited, or determined by any external thing, for all things derive from Him while He derives from none. His being and His decrees rest entirely upon His own free and sovereign will.

Angels and Men —The rational created beings who are the subjects of God’s eternal decree of predestination. In Reformed theology, God’s sovereign plan extends beyond the human race to include the angelic realm: some angels are elected and preserved in their holy state, while others are permitted to fall and are foreordained to everlasting punishment. This underscores the total scope of God’s cosmic governance.

Aseity —The attribute by which God exists of and from Himself, owing His being to nothing outside Himself. The word comes from the Latin *a se*, meaning “from oneself.” God alone is self-existent and un-derived; He is the uncaused source of all things and depends upon nothing, while all else depends entirely upon Him. It is closely bound to His all-sufficiency and independence.

Athanasian Creed —A detailed historic Christian creed that carefully defines the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ, strongly emphasizing the equality of the three divine persons and the two natures of Christ, and defending essential Trinitarian and Christological truth.

Catechism —Structured summary tools—often using a question-and-answer format—designed for systematic Christian instruction, memorization, and discipleship.

Catholic (Universal) —Universal; referring to the whole Christian church across time and geography, rather than specifically the Roman Catholic Church.

Confession —The public declaration or formal written summary of biblical doctrines and convictions held by believers and the church.

Godhead —The divine nature or Deity—the one, undivided, infinite essence that is God. The single Godhead subsists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who are one in substance, power, and eternity. To speak of the Godhead is to speak of the fullness of what it is to be God.

Holy Spirit —The third person of the Trinity, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, who applies redemption through regeneration, indwells believers, and sanctifies them progressively.

Immutable —Unchangeable in His being, perfections, purposes, and promises. God neither grows nor diminishes, neither learns nor forgets, neither improves nor decays, for He is already and eternally perfect. His immutability is the ground of all confidence in His Word, since what He has decreed and promised can never alter.

Incomprehensible —Not that God is unknowable, but that He can never be fully comprehended or exhaustively grasped by any finite mind. The creature may truly know God as He reveals Himself, yet never completely, for the infinite can never be contained by the finite. We know Him truly, but not totally.

Infallible —Where inerrancy speaks to the factual accuracy of the original manuscripts, infallibility speaks to the Bible's complete trustworthiness as our guide for faith and life. Because God cannot deceive, His Word will never mislead us, though we may certainly mislead ourselves through careless or faithless reading of it.

Omniscience —God's perfect and complete knowledge of all things—past, present, and future, actual and possible. He knows all things immediately, eternally, and infallibly, never learning and never forgetting. Nothing is hidden from Him and nothing is uncertain to Him, for His knowledge is infinite and independent of the creature.

Persons —In Trinitarian language, the three distinct subsistences within the one divine essence—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They are not three gods, nor three parts of God, nor three names for one person, but three who are genuinely distinct yet share fully and equally the one undivided substance. The distinction among the persons lies in their eternal relations, not in any difference of nature or being.

Revelation —God's direct act of making His character, will, and redemptive purpose known to mankind, culminated in the written Scriptures. See also Natural Revelation and Special Revelation.

Self-Sufficiency —God is entirely complete and perfect within Himself. He lacks absolutely nothing and has no needs, weaknesses, or dependencies that must be fulfilled by anyone or anything outside of Himself.

Sovereignty —God's absolute, supreme, and unchallengeable authority and dominion over the entire universe.

Spirit —A being without body or material parts, immaterial and invisible. To confess God as “a most pure spirit” affirms that He has no physical form and is not composed of parts, but is simple, whole, and undivided in His being. As spirit, He is present everywhere and is perceived not by the senses but known through His revelation.

Substance —The essential divine nature shared identically, fully, and indivisibly by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father —The first person of the Trinity, unbegotten, who planned redemption from eternity, sent the Son, and adopts believers as His children.

The Son —The second person of the Trinity, eternally begotten of the Father, who became incarnate as Jesus Christ to accomplish redemption and now reigns at the Father's right hand.

Trinity —The biblical truth that the one true God eternally exists as three distinct, co-equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

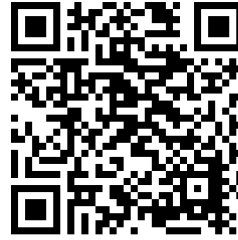
Westminster Confession of Faith —The 1647 Reformed doctrinal standard and subordinate summary of faith produced for Presbyterian churches.

Westminster Shorter Catechism —A concise catechism produced by the Westminster Assembly, designed for instructing children and beginners in the Christian faith.

Worship —The reverent and obedient response of God’s people to His glory, expressed through prayer, praise, the reading and preaching of Scripture, and the sacraments, all according to God’s Word.



LESSON CONTENT



MONERGISM STUDY GUIDE