

DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ESSENCE/ATTRIBUTES

October 30, 1994

I. Preliminary considerations.

- A. The Bible does not begin with arguments seeking to establish or prove the essence or existence of God.
- B. Instead, the Word of God emphatically declares His existence and offers information on the nature and character of God.
- C. Since the essence of God deals with concepts beyond the pale of human experience and existence, one should be keenly aware of human limitations when dealing with this subject.
- D. At this point the finite understanding of man seeks to comprehend and grasp the infinite nature of God.
- E. Independent of divine disclosure, man possesses no knowledge of divinity that qualifies him to declare who or what God is.
- F. Our entire understanding of God, His essence and nature is derived from the divine revelation of the Scripture.
- G. This presupposes that the Bible is the only authentic revelation from God concerning Himself and His plan.

I. Definition and description.

- A. The term "essence" is derived from a Greek noun (φύσις, phusis), meaning substance or inner nature.
- B. This term denotes the sum of the innate properties and powers by which one person differs from another, their distinct natural characteristics.
- C. Essence implies being and existence, and so refers to the qualities and/or attributes of God.
- D. The glory of God often refers to His essence or some specific attribute of His essence (Rom.1:23; 3:23).
- E. God possesses all the attributes of His essence at all times, yet not all are necessarily manifest at the same time (on the same occasion).
- F. The essence of God is composed of His attributes and the characteristics that are inherent in Him by virtue of those attributes.

II. The divine attributes.

- A. The divine attributes are ten in number.
- B. They are qualities that are inherent in God and are objectively real.
- C. The attributes function at all times. However, not one of God's attributes functions alone or at the expense of any other attribute.
- D. Righteousness is the watchdog of God's essence. Nothing can be done which is in conflict with Righteousness.
- E. The attributes are divided into two groups of five, the moral attributes and the non-moral attributes.

The non-moral attributes:

SOVEREIGNTY

- A. This term defines the fact and nature of God's volition.
- B. Since God possesses volition, He makes decisions, plans, policies, etc. (Gen.1:3, 26).
- C. Due to His nature, He has no rivals as He exercises supreme power and rule over everyone and everything. There is nothing outside His jurisdiction (Deut.4:39; Ps.93:1,2; Isa.44:6-8; 45:5-8,18).
- D. As the absolute authority in the universe, He alone possesses authority as a part of His essence, which He may or may not exercise, as He sees fit (Job.34:13-15).
- E. All other authorities, human and angelic, are delegated by God (Dan.4:32, 35; Rom.13:1-7).
- F. God's Sovereignty allows human and angelic volition to adjust or not adjust to His decisions.
- G. It is God's sovereign will for all men to make the salvation adjustment and the maturity adjustment (1Tim.2:3, 4).
- H. Three applications of divine Sovereignty include:
 1. The directive will of God: what God desires.
 2. The permissive will of God: what God allows or tolerates.
 3. The overruling will of God: God's intervention in judgment when His directive will has been spurned.

ETERNAL LIFE

- A. God has no beginning and no end to His existence (Ps.90:2; Isa.43:13; Lam.5:19; Rev.1:8).
- B. He is absolute existence (Ex.3:14).
- C. God is the creator of time, and organizes the ages of time for His purpose (Heb.1:2; 11:3).
- D. He preexists all creation and will continue to exist after the dissolution of this creation (Gen.1:1; 2Pet.3:10-13).
- E. God devised a plan whereby He could impart His life to mankind (Jn.3:16; 4:14).

OMNIPOTENCE

- A. This word is derived from the Latin term meaning "all powerful".
- B. God is all-powerful; able to do all things He desires to do.
- C. Therefore, His power and authority are often closely linked (Ps.93:1,2; Isa.40:26-31; Jer.27:5).
- D. His power and authority are limitless (1Chron.29:11,12).
- E. Although it is true that God can do all the things He wants to do, He does not will to do all the things He can do.
- F. God limits the exercise of His power to remain consistent with His essence and plan.
- G. God cannot do some things due to His nature.
 1. He cannot deny Himself (2Tim.2:13).
 2. He cannot lie (Heb.6:18).
 3. He cannot tempt anyone to sin (Jam.1:13).
 4. He cannot be tempted with evil (Jam.1:13).

OMNIPRESENCE

- A. This word is derived from the Latin term meaning "all present".
- B. God is personally present everywhere, both within and outside the material creation (Ps.139:7-12).
- C. This is not pantheism, which says that God is the creation and denies His person.
- D. God's essence penetrates and fills the universe, without diffusion, division, multiplication, etc. (Jer.23:23, 24).
- E. God is both immanent and transcendent (Act.17:24-28; Job.1:6,7; 2:1,2).
- F. He is both in Heaven and on the earth simultaneously (Isa.66:1).
- G. This is a source of great comfort to the adjusted, and very disconcerting to the maladjusted (Mt.28:20).

OMNISCIENCE

- A. This term is derived from the Latin meaning "all knowing".
- B. While this attribute is closely associated with Omnipresence, God's knowledge is not restricted to "being there".
- C. God's knowledge eternally preexisted all things (1Pet.1:20).
- D. Omniscience knows all that was, is, or can ever be. God knows that which is actual, or probable, or possible (Mt.11:21-24).
- E. Every detail of history is before God at all times. He knows the end as well as the beginning (Isa.46:10).
- F. He does not learn, forget, remember, or acquire knowledge; He knows all things perfectly.
- G. This includes all men, what they think, say, or do, even before they do it (Ps.33:13-15, 139:1-6).
- H. While He possesses Omniscience, His knowledge is not causative. What He foreknows and what He predestines are not the same (Rom.8:29,30).

The moral attributes:

RIGHTEOUSNESS

- A. God's Righteousness (+R) is absolute (1Sam.2:2; Isa.6:3; Rev.3:7; 4:8; 6:10).
- B. He is absolutely free from sin in every way (1Jn.1:5; 3:5).
- C. He is perfect in person and character (Deut.32:4; Ps.11:7; 111:3).
- D. He is righteous in His attitudes and actions (2Sam.22:31; Rev.19:2,11).
- E. God has no interest in activity or people who are less than righteous (Ps.5:4-6).
- F. That which is opposed to His Righteousness is called wickedness, evil, or iniquity.
- G. This attribute occupies the foremost position of all of God's attributes, and is the watchdog of God's essence.
- H. All other attributes must check their function against +R.
 - I. Applications to the unbeliever.
 1. No one can attain to the standard of absolute Righteousness (Rom.3:23).
 2. Man's works are not sufficient for salvation (Isa.64:6).
 3. The only way to obtain absolute Righteousness and be accepted before God is to believe in Christ (2Cor.5:21).
 - A. Applications to the believer.
 1. Once you acquire +R you cannot lose it (1Cor.1:2).
 2. While we are positionally righteous in Christ, we are exhorted to live in a manner consistent with the character of God (Eph.4:22-24).
 3. Absolute, experiential Righteousness is not possible in P2 (1Jn.1:8,10).
- K. This attribute is often referred to by the term "holiness".

JUSTICE

- A. This attribute is that aspect of God's character that demands that He deal with all creatures based on +R.
- B. Justice is not arbitrary, but is based strictly on the perfect standard of Righteousness that God possesses.
- C. God's Justice cannot be unfair or discriminating (Gen.18:25; 2Chron.19:7; Ps.19:9; 89:14).
- D. Due to perfect Justice, God is no respecter of persons and does not show partiality (Deut.10:17; Job.34:19; Eph.6:9).
- E. Justice demands that all sins and all sinful conditions be judged at some point in the Angelic Conflict (A/C).
- F. All sins were judged in the person of Christ, and Justice was satisfied.
- G. This is known as propitiation, or the satisfaction of Justice (Rom.3:25; 1Jn.2:2; 4:10).
- H. Justice acts in two ways.
 - 1. Remuneration (Deut.7:9,12,13; Mt.25:21; 1Pet.1:7-9).
 - 2. Retribution (Gen.2:17; Ex.34:7; Ezek.18:4; 2Thess.1:6-8).

LOVE

- A. This attribute is equally present among all three members of the Godhead (1Jn.4:8).
- B. This attribute is eternal and unchanging (Micah.7:18-20).
- C. Even though man has not always loved God, God has always loved mankind (Jn.3:16; 1Jn.4:10).
- D. This attribute does not spring from emotions, but only acts in accord with Righteousness.
- E. God's Love is not emotional, sloppy, or maudlin, but is the expression of His care and concern for the best interests of any with whom He deals.
- F. God's Love is not only directed toward those He finds attractive, desirable, or amenable to His person, but is equally directed toward His enemies (Rom.5:8,10).
- G. God's Love motivated Him to offer His own Son in the place of His enemies (Jn.3:16; 2Cor.5:21).
- H. Once one is a son of God, he cannot be separated from the Love of God (Rom.8:35-39).
 - I. Both overt blessing and divine discipline (DD) are expressions of the Love of God (Mt.6:4,6; Heb.12:5-13).
 - J. Variations in blessing among believers are not due to a lack of Love on God's part, but to negative volition and disobedience.

IMMUTABILITY

- A. This attribute deals with the fact that God cannot change in His essence (Ps.102:26, 27; Mal.3:6).
- B. God cannot become better or worse than what He already is.
- C. You could not improve upon perfection.
- D. This attribute is absolute and is the glue that binds all of the other attributes together.
- E. God's faithfulness stems from His Immutability (Num.23:19, 20; Lam.3:22,23; Mal.3:6).
- F. God is faithful to:
 - 1. Save and keep saved (Jn.3:16; 2Tim.2:13).
 - 2. Forgive (1Jn.1:9).
 - 3. Protect us in temptation (1Cor.10:13).
 - 4. Complete His plan for the believer (1Cor.1:8,9; 1Thess.5:23,24).
- G. God's word is immutable and faithful (Ps.119:86, 89; Isa.40:8).

VERACITY

- A. This attribute deals with the fact that God is the only source of truth (Ps.31:5; 117:2).
- B. This attribute means that it is impossible for God to lie or ever do anything in contradiction to the truth (Ti.1:2; Heb.6:18).
- C. He does not acquire truth; He is truth, and manifests this in His:
 - 1. ways (Ps.25:10; 86:15; Rev.15:3).
 - 2. works (Ps.111:7,8; Dan.4:37).
- D. Therefore, He expects His creation to deal in truth, just as He does (Ps.51:6; Jer.5:1-3).
- E. Since His word proceeds from His essence, it is absolutely trustworthy and reliable (2Sam.7:28; Ps.119:151).
- F. The word of truth is the basis for our salvation.
 - 1. Ph1 salvation (Col.1:5; Jam.1:18).
 - 2. Ph2 salvation (sanctification, Jn.17:17; 2Thess.2:13)
 - 3. Ph3 salvation (SG3, Col.1:5; 2Thess.2:14).

I. The nature of God.

- A. The word of God (WOG) makes God's attributes clear.
- B. He possesses certain characteristics that further help us define and understand Him.
- C. While these characteristics are not a part of His essence, they are nonetheless true.
- D. These characteristics include:
 - 1. Personality.
 - a. God is a person; He possesses and manifests all that one would expect of a person.
 - b. He has self consciousness (Isa.45:5,6).
 - c. He has self determination (Job.23:13; Rom.9:11; Eph.1:11; 3:11).
 - d. He executes His decisions (Dan.4:24, 33).
 - e. He is alive (Josh.3:10; Mt.16:16).
 - f. He uses the normal pronouns when referring to Himself, including "I", "Me", "Mine", etc.
 - g. He is discriminating and discerning (Gen.1:4,7).
 - h. He chooses those with whom He will associate and those with whom He fellowships (Jn.14:21-23).
 - 2. Spirituality.
 - a. God is immaterial, yet real (Jn.4:24).
 - b. He is invisible in essence (Rom.1:20; 1Tim.1:17).
 - c. Man is not capable of seeing God and living (Ex.33:20).
 - d. No one has ever seen the divine essence (Jn.1:18).
 - e. Only in Ph3 will the believer be able to see God (Rev.22:4).
 - f. This is why the Jews, and everyone else for that matter, were told not to make images (Deut.4:15-19).
 - 3. Infinity.
 - a. God is without boundary or limitation of any kind.
 - b. God's infinity in relationship to space is called immensity.
 - c. God is not confined by space, but all finite space depends on Him.
 - d. This is also known as transcendence.
 - e. God's infinity in regard to time is called eternity.
 - f. He is free from the succession of time, and functions outside of time.
 - g. God created both space and time for His purposes (Jn.1:3; Col.1:16).
 - h. Since God has no beginning or end, He is called the eternal God (Gen.21:33).

II. The names of God.

- A. The names of God as found in the OT are often designed to communicate some attribute or characteristic of God.
- B. This is one way God revealed Himself before the completed canon.

- C. The two major names for God were אֵל ('el), which means strong or mighty [אֱלֹהִים, 'elohiym, is the plural, indicating a plurality in the Godhead], and יְהוָה (yehowah), which is derived from the "to be" verb, and means existence or being.
- D. These names are joined in compound with other words (to teach some aspect of the divine essence), including:
1. אֵל עֶלְיוֹן, 'el 'el yon, the most high God, Sovereignty.
 2. אֵל עוֹלָם, 'el 'olam, the God of eternity, Eternal Life.
 3. אֵל שַׁדַּי, 'el shaday, the God of breasts, Omnipotence.
 4. אֵל רֹאֵי, 'el ra 'iy, the God who sees, Omniscience.
 5. אֵל אֱמוּנָה, 'el emunah, the God who is faithful or reliable, Immutability
 6. אֵל גְּמוּלוֹת, 'el gemuloth, the God of paybacks, Justice.
 7. יְהוָה צַדִּיק, YHWH, tzed qenu, the Lord our righteousness, Righteousness.
 8. אֲדֹנָי, adhoni, Sovereign Lord.
- E. While these are not all of the compound names used to teach the nature of God, they are indicative.

III. Figures of speech and the essence of God.

- A. All figures of speech are language of accommodation to communicate some fact concerning God.
- B. The first figure of speech most commonly used in regard to the essence of God is an anthropomorphism.
- C. An anthropomorphism is to ascribe to God a bodily part that He does not possess.
- D. Some of the most common include:
1. hand.
 2. arm.
 3. eyes.
 4. face.
 5. breasts.
 6. finger.
 7. mouth.
 8. heart.
- E. The second figure of speech commonly used to communicate some aspect of God or His plan is an anthropopathism.
- F. This is to ascribe to God some human emotion, passion, or weakness which He does not possess.
- G. The most common among these include:
1. hate.
 2. jealousy.
 3. repent or change the mind.
 4. searching.
 5. remembering.
 6. coming or going.

IV. The unity and trinity of God as related to the divine essence.

- A. The term "trinity" is not a term which is found anywhere in the Scripture.
- B. Nevertheless, it is a Biblical term which communicates the revealed truth that the eternal God exists in three persons.
- C. God is seen to be one in essence, but three in personality.
- D. This doctrine is like many doctrines, and is taught in fragmentary units in order to veil the truth to negative volition.

E. Yet the positive believer can see this truth clearly.

F. The unity.

1. God is one in essence, undivided and indivisible.
2. It is clearly taught in the O.T. that there is one true God, as opposed to a plurality of gods (Deut.4:35,39; 6:4; 1Kgs.8:60; Isa.45:5,6).
3. This teaches a strict monotheism as opposed to polytheism.
4. The same truth is taught in the N.T. (Mk.12:29-32; Jn.17:3; 1Cor.8:4-6; 1Tim.2:5).

G. The trinity.

1. The concept of the trinity within the Godhead is based solely on divine revelation.
2. By the term "trinity" we mean that there are three distinct personalities in the Godhead, possessing one essence.
3. Jews, Mohammedans, Unitarians, and Jehovah's Witnesses are some who reject this truth.
4. This was taught in the O.T., as seen in the fact that:
 - a. YHWH is distinguished from YHWH.
 - b. YHWH has a Son (Ps.2:7).
 - c. The HS is distinguished from God (Gen.1:2; 6:3; Ps.51:11)
 - d. Plurals are used of God (Gen.1:26,27; 3:22; 11:7).
 - e. Three persons are in view in Isa.48:16 and 61:1.
5. Beyond this, the revelation of the "angel of the Lord" teaches a plurality in the Godhead.
 - a. The angel of YHWH is YHWH (Gen.16:7-13; 22:15-19; Ex.3:1-4).
 - b. The angel of YHWH is distinguished from YHWH (Gen.24:7; 23:20; Num.22:31; Zech.1:12).
6. It is taught in the N.T. in such places as Mt.28:19, 2Cor.13:14, and 1Pet.1:2.
7. The attributes and actions of deity are ascribed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
8. Without seeking to over-simplify matters, the Father is often seen to be the planner, the Son is seen as the executor, and the Holy Spirit as the revealer of the plan.
9. These personality distinctions are eternal and are not in conflict with the unity of God.

V. The essence of God as related to His eternal plan of salvation.

- A. Due to the attribute of Omniscience, there never was a time when God did not know all things.
- B. Therefore, the plan of salvation was no afterthought or second best situation.
- C. God's motive for allowing free will, sin, and evil is to bring glory to His person, as well as demonstrating to the A/C that God is who He says He is.
- D. This is not self-praise, but God recognizes His glory and claims it in the interest of absolute truth.
- E. The essence of God is due glory, and this is recognized by those who are positive (Rev.4:8-11; 5:13; 7:10-12; et al.).
- F. Refusal to give God the glory due Him characterizes negative volition (Rev.14:7).
- G. His Omniscience determined that this plan would be predicated upon grace.
- H. Grace is the divine operating procedure in regard to the administration of His plan (2Tim.1:9).
 - I. The plan of salvation makes manifest all the attributes of His essence, as well as His marvelous nature (Eph.1:3-14).

VI. Categories of false or anti-theistic theories.

- A. Many have advocated systems of belief that are in contradiction to the truth of strict monotheism.
- B. All of these systems are satanic viewpoint, STA (sinful trend of Adam) human viewpoint, or a combination of the two.
- C. They are designed to delude man, destroy him, and rob God of the glory due to Him.
- D. Atheism.
 1. This system advocates the lie that there is no God.
 2. The logical corollary of this system is evolution.
 3. Those who espouse this often move to nihilism, or the doctrine that nothing exists and

there is no truth.

4. Others move into hedonism, or the teaching that pleasure is the sole end in existence.

5. Atheism leads to anarchy in morals and ethics.

E. Agnosticism.

1. This is the system which states that one cannot know anything for certain in regard to God or His person.

2. These types deny the inspiration of divine revelation.

3. Of course this leads to despair, since one can never come to know anything for certain.

4. This results in a lack of objective standards of right and wrong, and anarchy ultimately results.

F. Polytheism.

1. This advocates belief in a plurality of gods.

2. Polytheism distributes the perfections and functions of the eternal God among a plurality of limited gods.

3. This system is confusion, since one could never really know if they had a relationship with the correct god.

4. Nor could they ever be secure in the notion that their god could not somehow be beaten or overpowered by another god.

G. Pantheism.

1. This is the belief that God and the universe are one.

2. It denies the transcendence of God, as well as His personality.

3. This system claims that God is just the sum total of all that exists.

4. The Hindu religion is predicated upon this belief.

H. Deism.

1. This belief admits that God is personal, infinite, and holy.

2. It advocates the idea that God created the universe as a self-sustaining entity.

3. He endued the universe with certain natural forces that would cause it to be self sustaining and self-perpetuating.

4. He then abandoned the universe without revealing Himself in any way.

5. Although not giving man any revelation, He will finally judge him in the end.

6. This system denies God's immanence.

I. Materialism.

1. This is a form of atheism that denies the existence of God. It states that all things may be explained by the material.

2. They advocate the notion that matter is eternal, and life is only a product of matter.

3. Material well being should rule in matters of conduct arises from this system.

4. This system spawns communism and monetary reversionism.

J. Idealism.

1. This theory contends that the mind or reason is the only entity of consequence.

2. The material world is no more than an impression or illusion of the mind.

3. Some believe that there is a God, but He did not create material things.

4. This leads to the notion that matter is evil, since it is not mind.

5. Christian scientists subscribe to this satanic viewpoint.

K. Evolution.

1. Under this satanic doctrine, two viewpoints may be observed.

2. The first is atheistic evolution, which states that there is no God, and all that exists came about over time.

3. Several problems exist with this theory.

a. The law of cause and effect demands an original cause.

b. The first law of thermodynamics teaches that neither matter nor energy can be

created. *By the way, this harmonizes with the finished creation as taught in Gen.2:1,2 and Heb.4:3.*

- c. The second law of thermodynamics or entropy increase is in complete contradiction to evolution.
 - d. If one takes the Bible seriously, the massive amounts of time required for this theory never existed.
4. The second theory is theistic evolution, which states that God created the original materials, but contends that evolution is the method by which all development occurred.
5. Problems include:
- a. Again, the lack of time.
 - b. A lack of understanding of the essence of God; He never created anything which was less than perfect.
 - c. Complete lack of Scriptural documentation.
 - d. The Scripture refutes upward evolution on D+5 (day 5) of restoration.
 - e. Add to this all of the problems above with atheistic evolution.

VII. The essence of God is revealed through natural creation (Ps.19:1-6; Rom.1:18-20). Man's rejection of God's revelation through creation resulted in idolatry.

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