

Doctrine, Passions, and Practices **Who is God and what is He up to?**

The most painful experience of modern consciousness is the loss of center.

— Richard Weaver

Doctrine

1. God is infinitely more important than anything else. God has always been, without beginning (Psa 90:2). God created everything that exists – out of nothing (Heb 11:3; Col 1:16). Whatever exists, exists only at God's good pleasure (Heb 1:3), and it exists for God's own purposes (Rom 11:36). We were created to know God, depend on God, worship God, obey God, delight in God, glorify God (I Cor 10:31). So God is infinitely more important than anything else (Isa 40:15). And 100 years from now all that will matter to you is God – and whether or not God was the passionate center of your life.
2. In God's Word we read that God has always existed as a Trinity, three persons in complete unity of will and purpose: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is equally and fully God. But (here's a mystery) at the same time there is only one God (Deu 6:4; Rom 3:30).

God the Father is fully God (I Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6).

... yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (I Cor 8:6)

God the Son is fully God (John 1:1; see also Isa 9:6; Mark 1:1; John 10:33; Romans 9:5; Phil 2:5-6; Titus 2:13).

In the beginning was the Word [Jesus, see v.14] , and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

God the Spirit is fully God (Mat 28:18-20; Acts 5:3-4; John 14:18; Psa 139:7-8; 1 Cor 2:10-11).

Acts 5:3-4 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to men but to God."

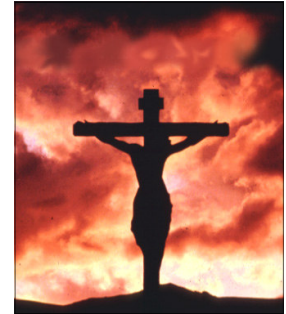
3. It's not that God appears in three different forms at different times – sometimes as Father, sometimes as Son, sometimes as Holy Spirit. It's that God is actually three distinct persons all the time – at the same time as He is one in essence (Gen 1:26; Matt 3:16-17; Matt 28:20; I Peter 1:2)

Matthew 3:16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

4. Each member of the Trinity has a different function:

The Father is the leader of Jesus and the Spirit, without being more God-like than Jesus and the Spirit. From before the foundation of the world, with Jesus and the Spirit, He planned Creation, the sending of Jesus, the pouring out of His wrath upon Jesus as payment for sin, the resurrection of Jesus, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those who trust Jesus, the saving of people from every nation and tongue and tribe, and the final destinies of heaven and hell – all for the righteous and loving purpose of giving us the infinite joy of increasingly beholding the glory of His perfections forever.

Like the Father, **Jesus** has always existed as fully God. In order to die for our sins and rise again, Jesus took on full human nature. So Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. He purchased salvation by dying on the Cross, being punished by God the Father in our place, to pay for our sin.



Like the Father and the Son, **the Spirit** has always existed as fully God. The Spirit is not an "it" – just a force or power. He is a person like the Father and the Son: He chooses and acts and wills. He gives to us the salvation purchased on the Cross by Jesus: changing our hearts, giving us faith, strengthening and comforting us with the presence of the Father and of the Son, keeping us persevering in faith to the end.

5. God is not an impersonal force or power. God is a profoundly personal being – one God in three persons – who choose, will, speak, act, desire, rejoice, love. God is love (I John 4:8) – and this has always been passionately experienced within the Trinity as they rejoice and delight in their flawless perfections.

Mark 1:11 – The Father: "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well-pleased."

John 17:5 – Jesus: "... the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

John 17:24 – Jesus: "... You loved me before the foundation of the world."

John 17:26 – Jesus: "... that the love with which you have loved me may be in them..."

1 Timothy 1:11 "...in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed [Greek: "passionately joyful"] God with which I have been entrusted.

6. There is no other God than God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. We have all worshiped other so-called gods, but they were figments of our imagination (I Cor 8:4-5); demons masquerading as gods (I Cor 10:20).

7. God is holy (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8; I Chr 16:10; Psa 30:4). For God to be holy means that His perfections set Him infinitely above everything else that is (I Sam 2:2; Isaiah 40:25).

God alone has always been (Psa 90:2).

God alone has absolute power; He alone does whatever He Himself wants (Isa 40:25-26; Psa 115:3; Psa 135:6).

God alone is Creator – everything else was created (Gen 1:1).

God alone is sovereign over everything; nothing happens outside His ultimate will (Eph 1:11).

God alone has perfect and infinite wisdom (Rom 11:33-36).

God alone is omniscient, knowing everything perfectly all the time (Psa 147:5).

God alone is absolutely perfect, with no flaws or defects (Mat 5:4; Psa 18:30).
God alone is perfectly and all-powerfully good and loving (Psa 138:5)
God alone acts in free, unmerited mercy and grace (Eph 1:6,12,14)
God alone is full of infinite joy in Himself (I Tim 1:11; John 17:5,24)

Therefore God has infinite worth. On any scale of comparison, there is no other being who even shows up on the scale.

8. God is righteous. God's righteousness means that He always does what is right; and what is right is that He does everything to uphold and display His infinite worth. There is no standard of right and wrong above God; His infinite worth is the standard of right and wrong. Everything God does is right – because it's done for the sake of His name, His glory, His honor.

For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!

In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble! (Psalm 143:11)

This is profoundly loving of God, and good news for us, because our infinitely highest joy is beholding His glory and perfections.

9. This is why God created. God did not create because he needed anything (Acts 17:25). He created as an overflow of His infinite joy in being God (Job 38:4-7). He created so we could have the joy of beholding His glory (Isa 43:7). He created an amazing universe, world, and people – so we could see His glories and have Him as the joyful center of our lives -- knowing Him, trusting Him, depending on Him, being satisfied in Him, worshipping Him (Num 14:21; Psa 16:11; Psa 42:1; Hab 2:14; I Cor 10:31).



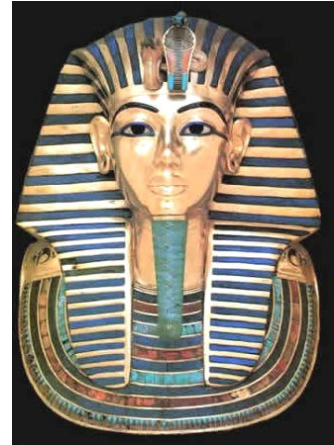
10. God created a universe and world and Adam and Eve and said it was "very good" (Gen 1:31). But this raises a question: Why is there evil? Did evil surprise God? Did God lose control of creation? Is evil free to do what it wants, or is God in control? Can Satan or evil people do to us whatever they want? I believe God's Word is clear that God is in sovereign control of evil – that He planned and purposed to allow evil because through it He would bring about infinite good of displaying His perfections: His mercy in the Cross and eternal salvation, and His wrath in eternal judgment.

11. Notice how Moses describes the evil actions of Joseph's brothers:

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it [evil] for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." (Gen 50:20)

- a. The brothers "meant evil." Their action of selling Joseph into slavery was their willful choice. This shows that we are not robots. We make real choices which have real effects. And because their action was intended to harm Joseph, it was evil, and caused God grief and anger and brought God's judgment.

- b. Some people think that if the brothers really chose their actions, then God had nothing to do with their actions. But that's not what the verse says.
 - c. Notice that it was not just the brothers who "meant" their actions; God also "meant" their actions. God meant (planned to allow) their evil action, without taking away from the fact that they willed and chose and were responsible for their evil action. How can both be true? This is a mystery which Scripture teaches but does not explain.
 - d. God's purpose for allowing their evil action was to bring about great good; that's why God is not evil when he plans and purposes to allow evil.
 - e. I love that God has set things up this way, because it means God really is in total control of the world, we really make genuine choices, and nothing will happen to me that's outside His good and loving and wise will.
 - f. If this is a new thought, spend time pondering these Scriptures: Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:27-28; Luke 22:22; Genesis 45:5-8; Psalm 105:17; Joshua 11:20; Job 1 & 2; Proverbs 16:4; Deuteronomy 2:30.
15. This is the answer to the problem of evil. People, demons, and Satan do evil. But God is sovereign over evil. God has planned and purposed to allow evil in the world for the sake of bringing about the infinite good of displaying His glory for our joy.
- Joseph's slavery brings food to Israel.
 - Pharaoh's hard heart brings about a powerful display of God's power.
 - Judas' betrayal of Jesus brings about the Cross.
 - The Cross brings about the salvation of a vast number of men and women from every nation, tongue, and tribe.



Practices and Passions

- 1. This is why, if we are trusting Jesus, we don't need to be afraid of any future trial. Not because I will never face trials; but because any trial that comes my way is purposefully allowed by God to bring me even deeper and sweeter fellowship with Jesus than I would have had otherwise.
For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor 4:17).
- This doesn't mean we don't grieve during trials; it means we don't grieve without hope (I Thessalonians 4:13). We are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10).
- 2. This shows us how to respond to the possibility of trials. We don't seek peace by trying to think that a trial could never happen. God has promised they will happen (Acts 14:23). We find peace by understanding that when God does purposefully allow trails for us — His purpose is to bring us even more joy in Jesus forever.
... as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Phil 1:20-21)

When facing death, Paul was free from fear, because the center of his life was not staying alive, but gaining deeper fellowship with Jesus Christ now and forever.

3. This assumes that you love Jesus more than anything else. But what if you feel nothing towards Jesus?. The problem is sin. Our hearts and wills have been corrupted, so we feel nothing towards Jesus, don't want God in our lives, and face God's just wrath. But Jesus was punished on the Cross so you could be forgiven and receive a new heart. So repent of your sin, trust Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Treasure, and you will be saved — Jesus will be the center of your life.
4. Jesus is the only one who can be the all-satisfying center of your life. So devote your life to knowing Jesus – learning about Him, worshiping Him, seeking Him, glorifying Him, talking about Him, obeying Him, finding all your heart satisfaction in His glorious perfections.

Psalm 27:4 One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

Psalm 36:7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.⁹ For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,⁶ when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;



Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Revelation 21:22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

For further discussion

Read Psalm 90:2, and ponder the truth that God has always existed: that God has had no beginning, and that from eternity past all that existed was God and nothing else. How does this impact you?

Read Isa 40:15, and talk about the truth that God is infinitely more important than anything else in existence. How does this impact you?

Read I Timothy 1:11, and think about the fact that here the word "blessed" means "joyful." Have you understood that God is joyful? Why or why not? What difference does this make?

Read I Corinthians 10:31. Has God and His glory been at the center of your life? If not, what has been at the center? Do you feel how wrong it is to have anything else at the center besides God?

In the past, how have you understood God's relationship to evil? Does it make sense to you that God is sovereign over evil? Is it possible that the future good of beholding Jesus face to face is so valuable all the suffering we face is absolutely worth it?

What do you fear? Have you responded to the fear by telling yourself it will never happen? Or have you responded like Paul — resting in the truth that whether it happens or not — you will receive more of Jesus?

Which passage listed on p.5 (#4) was most powerful to you? How much do you experience this kind of hunger for Jesus and joy in Jesus? What other desires compete? What steps can you take to nurture love for Jesus?

For further reading

Edwards, Jonathan. The End for which God created the World. You can probably find this sermon on-line. Or purchase the 2-volume set of his works published by Banner of Truth.

Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. Ch.14 on the Trinity, and ch. 16 on God's providence.

Piper, John. Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist.

Piper, John. God's Passion for His Glory.

Piper, John. The Pleasures of God. Excellent on God's delight in being God.

Taylor, Justin, and others. Suffering and the Sovereignty of God.