# Table of Contents

## UNIT ONE: PROLEGOMENA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. The Nature of Theology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Theology for God and the Church</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Sources for Theology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## UNIT TWO: BIBLIOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Contemporary Developments in Bibliology</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Inspiration of Scripture</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Authority of Scripture</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Inerrancy of Scripture</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Clarity of Scripture</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. The Preservation of Scripture</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## UNIT THREE: THEOLOGY PROPER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Open Theism: Postconservative Theology Proper</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Existence and Knowability of God</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Divine Nature</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Divine Attributes</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. God, Creation, and History</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Unit One: Prolegomena

I. THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY

Every student of theology has a particular conception of what theology is. This is a matter of significant debate among both evangelicals and nonevangelicals in contemporary theological literature. This section is a selective introduction to the debate.

A. Liberalism

1. Doctrine is man's account of his experience with "God"
   a. Friedrich Schleiermacher (18th century)
   b. Antisupernatural presupposition of the Enlightenment
   c. Mainline denominations of present day

2. Theology can't be systematic
   Since the Bible is a collection of merely human documents, there can be no systematic theology, only the varied "theologies" of the human authors and their traditions.

3. BTW: What makes someone "a liberal"?

B. Reformed/Scholastic Tradition

1. Scripture is God's revelation of himself for us to interpret into a systematic expression of its propositional content.

2. Thus, doctrine is properly organized information about God. In other words, theology is the "science" of God.
3. Some divided theology into "natural theology" and "revealed theology."

4. Examples

   a. **W. G. T. Shedd** (I,16): “Theology is a science that is concerned with both the Infinite and the Finite, with both God and the Universe. The material, therefore, which it includes is vaster than that of any other science. It is also the most necessary of all the sciences.”

   b. **Strong** (p. 1): “Theology is the science of God and of the relations between God and the universe.”

   c. **Lewis Sperry Chafer** (I,6): “Systematic Theology may be defined as the collecting, scientifically arranging, comparing, exhibiting and defending of all facts from any and every source concerning God and His works.”

   d. **Grudem** (21): “Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic. . . . systematic theology involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.”

C. **Postmodern Theology**

   1. Postmodern theological scholarship objects to the emphasis on doctrine as systematic and timeless

      a. Epistemological foundationalism, a construction of the modern era, is thoroughly discredited

      **BTW**: What is Foundationalism, and Why is it so Horrible?
b. There is no all-encompassing "metanarrative" for God's relationship with human beings. All doctrine is community-oriented and therefore designed to serve the needs of that group of people.

c. Many varieties, including liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc. See

2. Postliberalism: liberalism beyond existentialism (a.k.a. "The Yale School")
   a. Literature
      (2) George Lindbeck The Nature of Doctrine (1984)
      (3) Also David H. Kelsey, Kathryn Tanner
   b. View of theology (Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine)
      (1) Doctrine is "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action" which are formulated by the community based on its narrative traditions (including Scripture) and which apply to that community.
      (2) Postliberalism views traditional conservative theology as "cognitive-propositionalist" – it arises from an incorrect view of Scripture as a book of propositions about God to be organized and systematized.
(3) Postliberalism views traditional liberal theology as "experiential-expressivist" – it focuses on the individual's experience and does not account for the significant community orientation of religion.

3. Postconservatism: evangelicalism beyond foundationalism

a. Literature


(2) A postconservative manifesto: Stanley Grenz & John Franke, Beyond Foundationalism (2001)

(3) See also by Grenz: Revisioning Evangelical Theology (1993); Renewing the Center (2000)

b. Characteristics as a movement

(1) Not theologically liberal

(2) Not fundamentalist

Roger Olson: “Here I insist on a distinction between ‘evangelical’ and ‘fundamentalist’” (Roger Olson, “Whales and Elephants,” Pro Ecclesia [Spring, 1995]: 166.

See also Carl F. H. Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism

(3) Evangelical, yet not doctrinally conservative

“Postconservative evangelicals continue to hold to four defining features of evangelicalism. . . : conversionism, or an emphasis on the ‘new birth’ as a life-changing religious experience; biblicism, a reliance on the Bible as ultimate
religious authority; *activism*, a concern for sharing the faith; and *crucicentrism*, an emphasis on Christ’s atoning work on the cross. But they no longer make their chief role that of defending historic orthodoxy—especially Reformed scholasticism—against the ‘acids of modernity’” (Olson, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” *Christian Century* 112 [May 3]: 480, emphasis added).

(4) The evangelical movement is not primarily a doctrinal one

“Because evangelicalism is not primarily constituted by a body of beliefs, the evangelical ethos is more readily ‘sensed’ than described theologically” (Grenz, *Revisioning*, 31).

c. Methodological distinctives

(1) Focused on a "center" rather than "boundaries" (see Grenz's *Renewing the Center*).

(2) Traditional conservatism and liberalism alike are methodologically dependent on the foundationalism of philosophical modernism.

(3) Rejects correspondence model of truth, favoring the coherence model.

(4) Traditional (particularly reformed) theology views Scripture incorrectly as a catalog of doctrine rather than a narrative of God's gracious dealings with people.
(Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze*; Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* provide examples of postconservative narrative theology.)

(5) Theology is "the articulation of biblically normed, historically informed, and culturally relevant models of the Christian belief-mosaic for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated" (Grenz & Franke, 16)

A significant emphasis is on the experience and needs of the community as a source for theology.

4. Applications of postmodern theologies in evangelicalism
Influenced by both postliberalism and postconservatism, to varying degrees.

a. Emerging Church "movement,"

(1) particularly its theologically revisionist wing exemplified in Emergent
(www.emergentvillage.com)

(2) Emphasizes the narrative of Scripture and each person's "story" with God

(3) Emphasizes the imitation of Christ as his followers

(4) Less emphasis on doctrinal specifics

(5) Growing rejection of penal substitutionary atonement

b. Open theism

(1) Objection to perceived Greek philosophical corruption of early Christian doctrine

(2) Emphasis on narrative theology and the "story" of Christianity
(3) Influenced by process theology, yet still Trinitarian

5. Evangelical opponents of postmodern theologies
   a. Doctrinal conservationist element remains, emphasizing the propositional nature of revelation and the importance of the central doctrinal teachings of the faithful through the history of the church.
   f. Others, in the area of theology proper, will be named in Unit Three.

D. Reactions to Postmodern Theologies

1. Objections and fatal flaws
   a. The first and most important point of departure for every variety of postmodern theology is its locus of authority.
      (1) Postliberalism: authority is the community of faith as it formulates its doctrine.

      (2) Postconservatism (according to Grenz & Franke): authority is "the Spirit speaking through the Scriptures,"

   b. Postliberalism is still an "unbelieving" theology.
c. The objection against foundationalism  
Note: for more on this, see J. P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," *JETS* 48/1 (Mar 2005): 77-88.

d. Doctrine is downplayed and underestimated, and the search for truth is secondary to the theological enterprise.

But Francis Schaeffer's warning stands as a clear reminder of the urgency of the matter of truth: “It is not because it will make me feel good. . . or that I get a big emotional boost out of it. . . . [It is because] it is truth. The truth of what is. . . the reality of the total of life. On this basis, we should become a Christian.”

2. Good points and lessons learned

a. Strong foundationalism cannot give a consistently Christian account of the world.

   (1) This is already widely acknowledged among conservative theologians.

   (2) Rather, a milder form of foundationalism does seem to be appropriate and coincides well with the correspondence view of truth to which the Christian must be committed.
b. The Bible is not a book of propositions or a catalog of doctrine that can be assembled and organized in such a way as to replace the Bible itself.

(1) The Bible presents revelation of God that is in or can be restated in propositional form.

(2) But not all teaching of Scripture is statemental or didactic. Much of it is presented in poetic, narrative, or prophetic form.

(3) The Bible does present to us a narrative of God's redemptive work.

c. Postconservatives are right to be concerned about theology as orthodoxy without orthopraxy, as right belief without right living.

d. Christians are members of a community – a living body, an interdependent fellowship of Christ-followers. This should have an impact on our theological method (see "Tradition" below under "Sources for Theology").

II. THEOLOGY FOR GOD AND THE CHURCH

In light of this debate on the nature of doctrine, what is theology, and why should we study systematic theology?

A. The Different Types of Theology

1. Biblical Theology

Grudem: "Biblical theology gives special attention to the teachings of individual authors and sections of Scripture, and to the place of each teaching in the historical development of Scripture" (p. 22).
2. Historical Theology
   - History of doctrine, as distinguished from the study of church history
   - Strong: “traces the development of the Biblical doctrines from the time of the apostles to the present day, and gives account of the results of this development in the life of the church.”

3. Philosophical Theology
   Erickson: “Philosophical theology is theologizing which draws upon the input of philosophy rather than using merely biblical materials.”

4. Practical Theology
   The application of doctrine to the individual and corporate life of the church: evangelism, discipleship, worship, etc.
   But note: theology that does not affect the heart is incomplete. Living cannot be separated from doctrine – they are two sides of the same coin. In this sense, the idea of "practical" theology is superfluous or even misleading.

5. Systematic Theology
   a. Definition
      The comprehensive, holistic interpretation of Scripture for the purpose of intimately knowing and rightly worshiping God.
   b. The Loci of Systematic Theology
      - **Prolegomena** – preliminary issues of definition and method
      - **Bibliology** – doctrine of Scripture
      - **Theology Proper** – doctrine of God
      - **Christology** – doctrine of Christ
      - **Pneumatology** – doctrine of Holy Spirit
      - **Angelology** – doctrine of spirit beings
      - **Anthropology** – doctrine of man
      - **Hamartiology** – doctrine of sin
      - **Soteriology** – doctrine of salvation
      - **Ecclesiology** – doctrine of the church
      - **Eschatology** – doctrine of last things
B. Systematic Theology vs. "Doctrine"

C. A Balanced Emphasis on Theology
   1. Must be theocentric and doxological
   2. Must be pastoral and personal

D. BTW: How do I handle doctrinal disagreement?
   1. What is the relational context?
      a. Is this a brother/sister in Christ?
      b. Do you have spiritual oversight of this person?
         Your responsibilities are different if the sheep is a member of another flock
   2. What is your goal?
      a. Your purpose must not be to win a debate or display your knowledge
      b. You must tell/do/be the truth in love (Eph 4:15)
   
   a. Doctrines necessary for the **life** of the church
      e.g., the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the Trinity
   
   b. Doctrines necessary for the **health** of the church
      e.g., paedobaptism, “lordship” salvation, spiritual gifts(?), women in eldership(?)
   
   c. Doctrines distinctive to the **practice** of the local church
      e.g., millennial position, covenant theology, spiritual gifts(?), women in eldership(?),
      church polity
   
   d. Doctrines that are more **speculative** and should not divide any local assembly
      e.g., areas of Christian liberty, timing of the rapture, order of the divine decrees, *ordo salutis*

   
   a. What do I owe this person?
   
   b. What can I learn from this person?
   
   c. How can I cope with this person?

III. SOURCES FOR THEOLOGY

   What are the "raw materials" for theology? Is there more than one source?

   A. Tradition

   1. Biblical concept of tradition
2. Patristic regard for tradition
   There was no distinction between the Scriptures and the "apostolic tradition." They were the same.

3. Tradition in medieval theology
   Debates over teachings not derived from Scripture but supported by the church
   Basil the Great first pronounced the authority of extrascriptural tradition
   By the time of the Reformation there was firmly established in the Roman Catholic church a concept of two equally ultimate authorities: Scripture and tradition.

4. The meaning of *Sola Scriptura*
   a. Tradition II
      (1) There are two sources of authoritative teaching, the Scriptures and the doctrinal assertions of the Church. Both command absolute obedience.
      (2) The Holy Spirit not only inspired the Scriptures, but also continues to give new light to the Church in the form of the Church's extrascriptural teachings.
   
   b. Tradition I
      (1) The Scripture is the only authoritative source of right teaching.
      (2) Tradition is the combined wisdom of the faithful throughout church history and is an important voice in the interpretation of Scripture and the consideration of doctrine.
      (3) Tradition can never contradict Scripture and cannot add to Scripture, but any doctrine or interpretation not held at any time in church history is to considered highly suspect. Thus, tradition acts as a balancing force to possible abuses of the priesthood of the believer.
   
   c. Tradition 0
(1) Scripture is the only authoritative source of right teaching.

(2) Tradition is simply the wisdom of man and is therefore untrustworthy.

(3) Insofar as it agrees with Scripture, tradition is to be respected, but it is not to have any significant role in the interpretation of Scripture or consideration of doctrine.

5. The difficult balance between Scripture and Tradition
   a. Dangers of viewing tradition as a primary source of theology (Tradition II)
      (1) Nearly denies
      (2) Nearly denies
   b. Dangers of viewing tradition as insignificant for theology (Tradition 0)
      (1) Nearly denies
      (2) Nearly denies
      (3) Contains

Pinnock: Tradition "is a wonderful servant, but a poor master."

6. For Further Reading
B. Experience

1. Experience as contributor

2. Experience as corroborator


C. Reason

1. "Comprehensive, holistic interpretation" requires the application of sound reason to

2. To "love the Lord with all your…mind" reveals the cognitive/volitional aspect of sanctification.
3. "Taking every thought captive" is the aggressive employment of reason in the service of Christ.

4. Yet, expectations for systematization must be kept modest.

   “The vitality of the biblical history of God’s acts does not easily boil down to the clear, consistent formulations about God attempted by systematic theology. Try as we may, the biblical history resists systematization. Yet since the Bible wishes to address each hearer as a whole person, it invites and to some degree requires that each believer seek to bring its loose ends together, to listen for its unity, and to try to see it integrally. In that sense the Bible invites systematic, cohesive thinking about its varied events and messages. Christian teaching does well not to pretend finally to resolve that tension” (Thomas Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology: Volume One*, 40-1).

   “Reason's part is to act as servant of the written Word of God, seeking in dependence on the Spirit to interpret Scripture scripturally, to correlate its teaching, and to discern its application to all parts of life. We may not look to reason to tell us whether Scripture is right in what it says (reason is not in any case competent to pass such a judgment); instead, we must look to Scripture to tell us whether reason is right in what it thinks on the subjects with which Scripture deals” (J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, p. 48).

D. Scripture

   How does Scripture contribute to systematic theology?
Unit Two: Bibliology

I. CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN BIBLIOLOGY

A. The Impact of Postmodernism

1. Hermeneutics
   a. Not only is the interpreter interpreting the text, but the text is interpreting the interpreter
   b. Meaning arises from the interplay between reader and text.
   c. Since all of us come to Scripture out of different frames of reference, Scripture will have different truth for each of us

2. The role of Scripture in theology and the church
   a. Bibliology is subsumed under pneumatology (e.g., Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*)
   b. Doctrines of inspiration and illumination are blurred together
   c. The Bible primarily witnesses to the Christian "story," and its absolute truthfulness is de-emphasized

B. The Emphasis on Scripture's Human Element

1. Views of Scripture's Composition
   a. Broad adoption of literary criticism methods that emphasize composition process. Especially source, form, and redaction criticism
b. Debate among evangelicals
   - Needs to be a balance between obscurantism and a naïve confidence in tools.
   - Carson: “... although literary tools offer to interpreters of Scripture a variety of devices to bring out the meaning of the text, they have sometimes become ponderous ways of saying the obvious, or (which is worse) refined ways of distorting the obvious” (p. 32).
   - Remember that conservatives are often the most skilled in genuine literary tools: biblical languages, syntax, grammatical-historical exegesis, etc.

2. A discounting of the concursive theory
   a. Grenz's Theology for the Community of God
   b. Wolterstorff's appropriated discourse view in *Divine Discourse*

C. The Diminishing Authority of the Scriptures in the Church

1. An anti-authoritarian stance current in the Western world.
   a. Pervasive rebellious attitude toward established authority

   b. A sense sophistication which enables us to ignore the practical implications of Scripture.

2. A diminishing of the belief in the sufficiency of Scripture
II. THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

A. The Preparation of the Biblical Writers

(See further, Gordon R. Lewis, "The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in Inerrancy.)

1. The human authors had characteristics common to all people as created in God's likeness.

2. The human authors' unique perspectives were prepared by divine providence.
   a. 
   b. 
   c.

Warfield: Preparation was “... physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives and indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them” (The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, 155).

3. The human author's research and writing were done under supernatural supervision

Lewis, p. 256: “All believers are indwelt, taught, and filled with the Spirit; only the writers of Scripture are said to have been inspired by the Spirit. The writers had the ministries of the Spirit common to all the people of God, but in addition they had the
special supervision of the Spirit as prophetic and apostolic spokesmen in their work of composing and writing books of the Bible.”

B. The Superintendence of the Biblical Writers (2 Peter 1:19-21)

1. The primacy of the “Word of prophecy” v. 19 (two views)
   a. Confirmative: NASB, Meyer, Lenski
   b. Comparative: Warfield, Alford, KJV

2. The origin of Scripture v. 20

3. The meaning of "moved" by the Holy Spirit v. 21
C. The Inspiration of the Documents

1. The definition of inspiration
   - “God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings.” (C. Ryrie, Basic Theology, 38)
   - “Inspiration is . . . a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given divine trustworthiness.” (Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, 131)
   - “Biblical inspiration [is the] . . . work of the Holy Spirit by which, without setting aside their personalities and literary or human faculties, God so guided the authors of Scripture as to enable them to write exactly the words which convey His truth to men, and in doing so preserved their judgments from error in the original manuscripts.” (K. S. Kantzer, “The Communication of Revelation,” in The Bible: The Living Word of Revelation, ed. M.C. Tenney, 180.)

2. The meaning of inspiration—2 Tim 3:16
   a. The meaning of "all" (πάσα)
   b. The meaning of "Scripture" (γραφή)
Note: Graphe has to do with the writings. Thus, in the biblical usage of the concept of inspiration, the writings, and not the writers, are inspired.

c. The meaning of "inspired by God" (θεοπνεύων)
   - "The Greek term has... nothing to say of inspiring or of inspiration: It speaks only of a ‘spiring’ or ‘spiration.’... What it says of Scripture is, not that it is ‘breathed into by God’ or is the product of Divine ‘inbreathing’ into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, ‘God breathed,’ the product of the creative breath of God” (Warfield, p. 133).
   - Gen. 2:7—"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."
   - Job 33:4—"The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

D. The Biblical Theme of Inspiration
   (Scholars often give both biblical and extra-biblical proofs. Better to concentrate on the Bible’s own claims to divine origin and trustworthiness.)


   1. Old Testament
      a. OT reports of direct speech from God to people
         Ex. 20:1-4 (cf. Dt. 4:12-13); Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 3:1-4:23
      b. Old Testament Reports of Prophetic Speech (i.e., God’s words spoken by human beings)
         (1) Prophets are viewed as authoritative messengers of God
            ➢ Pictured as messengers sent to speak God’s words to people.
“Thus says the Lord” as a royal decree formula. Messenger speech. Introductory formula ("Thus saith the Lord"-Jer. 31:2, 7, etc.); and standard conclusion ("declares the Lord God," Ezek. 20:44).

(2) The prophets speak God’s words
- Not just general thoughts, but the very words themselves.
- Nabhi= mouthpiece.
- Exod 4:12 “Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

(3) prophets often speak for God in the first person.
1 Kin. 20:13 Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I [am] the Lord.”

c. OT accounts of written words from God

(1) Several accounts of the writing of words that were then taken to be God’s words in written form.
Exod 17:14 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this [for] a memorial in the book and recount [it] in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.”

(2) The writing prophets
Jer. 30:2 Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: “Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you.”

2. NT perspectives on the OT
a. Many Old Testament writings are thought of as God’s speech.
Matt 1:22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

b. Individual words and letters of the OT are relied on.
Mat. 22:44-45 Jesus proves that David calls the Messiah “Lord” from Ps. 110:1

c. Minor details of the Old Testament prophecies are seen to be fulfilled in Christ’s life.
Mat. 2:5, from Mic. 5:2 (Bethlehem).

d. Minor historical details of the Old Testament are treated as trustworthy and reliable.
(Two pages in Grudem’s article)
Matt 12:3 But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?”

e. All of the Old Testament is said to be worthy of belief.

Luke 24:25 Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

3. The NT as words of God

a. NT records direct speech from God.
   Baptism of Christ, Transfiguration, Conversion of Saul, Peter’s Vision, etc.

b. NT records God's speech through Christ and the apostles
   Luke 5:1; John 3:34; 6:63, 68; Acts 4:29, 31; 2 Cor. 13:3

4. Christ's witness to the inspiration of the OT
   (See further, Robert Lightner, *A Biblical Case for Total Inerrancy*)

a. It is the final authority
   Matt 21:12-16

b. It will necessarily be fulfilled
   Matt 26:31, 54; John 10:35

c. Assumes truth of OT miracles
   Luke 4:27

Also burning bush, destruction of Sodom, Manna, Jonah, etc.
d. There is no distinction in value among the various parts of the OT

5. Christ's witness to the inspiration of the NT
   (Note: None of NT written while Christ was on earth)
   a. Jesus left revelation unfinished (John 16:12)
   b. Jesus prophesied the completion of Biblical revelation (John 16:13)
      Knowing what would be written under divine inspiration--gave them same authority as His own.

6. The apostles witness to biblical inspiration
   (See further, Edwin A. Blum, “The Apostles’ View of Scripture,” in Inerrancy.)
   a. The apostles continued the appeal to the Old Testament as justification for their Gospel.
      1Cor 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. . . .
   b. The apostolic preaching and teaching were tested by the Scriptures
      Acts 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily [to] [find] [out] whether these things were so.
   c. The apostles assumed that it was necessary for O. T. prophecy to be fulfilled
      Acts 1:16 “Men [and] brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;
   d. The apostles identified God with the Scriptures and vice versa
      Rom. 9:17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”
e. The apostles regarded the Scriptures as “the oracles of God”  
Rom. 3:2
Rom. 3:2 because to them were committed the oracles of God.

f. The apostles regarded other N. T. authors as writers of Scripture
2 Pet. 3:15 and consider [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation--as also our
beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as
also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to
understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they]
do] also the rest of the Scriptures.

1 Tim. 5:18 For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the
grain,” and, “The laborer [is] worthy of his wages.”
Luke 10:7 “And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give,
for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house.”

g. The apostles regarded their own writings as from God
1Thes. 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you
received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed [it] not [as] the word
of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who
believe.

7. The writers of the NT who were not from the twelve apostles (Paul, Luke, Jude, James)
a. There were prophets in the early church who were not of the twelve.
Acts 11:27; 13:1

b. These prophets received revelation from God, some of which God chose to have
preserved.
Eph. 3:5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been
revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:

c. These prophets who had writings preserved were closely associated with Christ or
the Apostles.
1Cor. 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things
which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. 38 But if anyone does not recognize
[this], he is not recognized.
III. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPITURE
(Note: see chapter 2 of David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God.*)

A. In the Objective Sense

1. Moral authority
   a. Authority exerted rightly to demand and achieve

   b. Moral authority has

2. Veracious authority
   a. Authority derived from who a person is by virtue of

   b. Veracious authority has

B. In the Subjective Sense

"The ontological ground of the text's authority is not the same as the epistemic acceptance of the text's authority" (Clark, 64).

1. Functional authority
   a. The Bible has authority because

   b. Epistemic acceptance of authority is not distinguished from
c. Represents the postmodern approach to the concept of authority

2. Biblical authority in the Christian life

   a. The possible sources for perceiving Scripture’s authority

      (1)

      (2)

      (3)

      (4) The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit

      The Holy Spirit works through the Scriptures to confirm the moral authority of Scripture, bringing confidence in and accountability to the Bible as the Word of God

   b. The Biblical Basis for the Internal Testimony of the Spirit

      (1) The Words of Scripture are self-attesting by its obvious truth and claims (see "The Proof of Inspiration" above)—2 Tim 3:16

      (2) The Holy Spirit brings his dynamic power to the truth of the Scriptures—1 Cor 2:4-14

         (a) Theme:

         (b) Verse 4—
c. Summary of the Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit


1. The Scripture objectively gives evidence that it is the Word of God. But these remain incapable in themselves of producing firm faith.

2. Without this ministry of the Spirit, confidence in the Scriptures as absolute divine truth is impossible.

3. The testimony of the Spirit, directed at the heart (mind) of man, causes him to yield to the evidence and acknowledge that Scripture is the Word of God.

4. The internal testimony explains how sinful men and women are given a faculty to perceive the self-evidencing proofs inherent in Scripture.

Grudem: “The Bible will commend itself as being persuasive... if we are thinking rightly about the nature of reality, our perception of it and of ourselves, and our
Theology I – Bibliology

perception of God. The trouble is that because of sin our perception and analysis of God and creation is faulty. Sin is ultimately irrational, and sin makes us think incorrectly about God and about creation” (79).

IV. THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE
(See Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in Inerrancy)

A. Recent Attitudes Toward Inerrancy

1. Until 1960’s, inerrancy was a given in evangelical/fundamental circles, and accepted as the historic view of the church.

2. New post-sixties view is that inerrancy is a new doctrine

3. Common Sense Realism

4. A shift in the perception of the burden of proof

See further, John Woodbridge, Biblical Authority, for refutation

B. Definition of Terms

1. Accommodation

   a. Definition: If God is to communicate with us, He must condescend to our capacity to receive his revelation

      ➢ Barth: “If God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and, above all, their Judaism, but adopted and made
use of these expressions in all their fallibility, we do not need to be ashamed when 
He wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness, and it is mere self-will and 
disobedience to try to find some infallible elements in the Bible.” (Quoted in Carson, 
p. 26)

➢ Vawter: “We should think of inspiration as always a positive divine and human 
interaction in which the principle of condescension has been taken at face value. To 
conceive of an absolute inerrancy as the effect of the inspiration was not really to 
believe that God had condescended to the human sphere but rather that He had 
transmuted it into something else. A human literature containing no error would 
indeed be a contradiction in terms, since nothing is more human than to err.” 
(Quoted in Carson, p. 26)

➢ Clark Pinnock: “What we all have to deal with is a Bible with apparent errors in it 
whose exact status we cannot precisely know. Whether in his inspiration or in his 
providence, God has permitted them to exist. . . . What God aims to do through 
inspiration is to stir up faith in the gospel through the word of Scripture, which 
remains a human text beset by normal weaknesses.” (Quoted in Carson, p. 26)

b. Some responses to this idea:

(1) They have radically redefined “accommodation” from its historic understanding.

(2) They have confused finiteness with sin and error. (Is it true, “nothing is more 
human than to err”?)

(a) Humanness is not destroyed if God superintended the writing of Scripture so 
that there are no errors.

(b) Human beings who in the course of their lives inevitably err and sin do not 
necessarily err and sin in any particular circumstance.

(c) Humanness is not compromised when they fail to err or sin.

(d) God who safeguards human writers from error in a particular circumstance has 
not compromised their humanness.
(3) They are inconsistent in their use of the humanity of the biblical writers.

(4) They contradict the unanimous witness of the Scriptures.

2. Infallibility

- “the quality or fact of being infallible or exempt from liability to err,” or “the quality of being unfailing or not liable to fail; unfailing certainty” (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

- Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, (1978) XI: “We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.”

- More recently (1960), infallibility has become a term for those who believe in limited inerrancy. Stephen T. Davis: “The Bible is infallible if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice.” Some argue that it should be used as the whole, as opposed to the parts.

- Perhaps a useful distinction can be made between infallibility and inerrancy: the former speaking of the effectiveness of God's Word, the latter to its reliability/accuracy.

- Therefore, *infallibility means that God's Word always accomplishes God's purposes.*

3. Inerrancy

(Relatively young word in English language--1837. Of course, “without error” before)

a. Dictionary definition

- “the quality or condition of being inerrant or unerring; freedom from error”

- “Does not err,” “free from error,” etc. (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
b. Theological definitions

- “Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences” (Feinberg, 294).

- “The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact” (Grudem, 90).

C. Historical Illustrations

1. Augustine (d. 430)

   Most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books: that is to say that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us and committed to writing, did not put down in these books anything false. If you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement, there will not be left a single sentence of those books, which if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away as a statement, in which, intentionally, the author declared what was not true” (Augustine Epistula 28.3).

2. John Calvin (d. 1564):

   - “The sure and infallible record” (Job, 744)
   - “The inerring standard” (Institutes, I, 149)
   - “The pure Word of God” (Institutes, III, 166; Minor Prophets, II, 177)
   - “The infallible rule of His Holy Truth” (Hebrews, p. xxi)
   - “Free from every stain or defect” (Minor Prophets, I, 506)
   - “The inerring certainty” (Psalms, II, 429)
   - “The certain and unerring rule” (Psalms, v, ii)
   - “Unerring light” (Psalms, iv, 480)
   - “Infallible Word of God” (Institutes, II, 48, and III, 309)
   - “Has nothing belonging to man mixed with it” (2 Timothy, p. 249)
   - “Inviolable” (Minor Prophets, III, 200, and John, I, 420)
   - “Infallible oracles” (Catholic Epistles, p. 131)
3. William Ames (d. 1633), Marrow of Theology, XXXIV:
   “Only those could set down the rule of faith and conduct in writing who in that matter
   were free from all error because of the direct and infallible direction they had from God.”

4. Niagara Bible Conference, 1878, I:
   “We believe that ‘all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,’ by which we understand
   the whole of the book called the Bible; nor do we take the statement in the sense in which
   it is sometimes foolishly said that works of human genius are inspired, but in the sense
   that the Holy Ghost gave the very words of the sacred writings to holy men of old; and
   that His Divine inspiration is not in different degrees, but extends equally and fully to all
   parts of these writings, historical, poetical, doctrinal and prophetical, and to the smallest
   word, and inflection of a word, provided such word is found in the original manuscripts. .
   .”

D. The Biblical Basis for the Inerrancy of the Scriptures

1. The biblical teaching on inspiration (2 Tim 3:16)

2. The Bible's teaching concerning its own authority
   a. Matt 5:17-18

   b. John 10:34-35

3. The way in which Scripture is used by Scripture
   (NT writers seem to assume the absolute truthfulness of the OT)
   a. There are instances where the whole argument rests on a single word
      Ex.: "Lord" in Matt 22:43-44

   b. There is an instance where the entire argument depends on the tense of a verb.
      “I am” to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection.
      Matt. 22:32 (NASB) “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of
      Jacob?” He is not the God of the dead but of the living.
c. There is an instance where the point depends on the singular as opposed to the plural. Gal. 3:16 (NASB) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as [referring] to many, but [rather] to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ. If text is not inerrant, difficult to see the point in these arguments. Jews could well say, “Well, text of OT is questionable there and may be wrong.”

4. The biblical teaching concerning the character of God
   a. God the Father, who breathed out the Scriptures, is Truth
      Titus 1:2 “God, which cannot lie.”

   b. God the Son, who brought truth to the remembrance of the NT writers, is Truth.
      John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth. . . .”

   c. God the Spirit, who was the agent in inspiration, is Truth.
      1 John 5:6-7 “because the Spirit is the truth.”

   d. The Scriptures, breathed out by God, are said to be truth
      Jn. 17:17 “Thy Word is truth.”

5. “Thus saith the Lord” brings an atmosphere where inerrancy is assumed.

6. The witness of Christ to the absolute reliability of the text

7. There are no demonstrated errors in Scripture
   God who is truth, bore along the writers of Christian Scripture, so that their documents were God-breathed. Certainly such a document is inerrant.

E. Further Explanations of the Doctrine of Inerrancy
   The various objections to the doctrine of inerrancy have necessitated certain refinements in its formulation over the years. The following clarifications are the result of these conversations.
1. Inerrancy is a doctrine that is biblically and theologically asserted, but which may not be demonstrated with all the data of the Scriptures.

2. Inerrancy applies to all parts of Scripture as originally written (the autographs).
   a. Any copy will contain some weaknesses, even errors due to transmission and translation.
   b. Critics’ objection that errors in a copy negate inerrancy in the originals proves too much:
      (1) it seems that there is no hope of knowing with any confidence what the originals said
      (2) judging the veracity and reliability of Scripture based on extant textual evidence becomes entirely a matter of human wisdom
   c. Better to affirm Derived Inspiration: copies and translations are inspired/inerrant to the extent that they reproduce the originals

3. The Bible can be inerrant and still speak in the ordinary language of everyday speech
   a. Inerrancy does not demand historical precision.
   b. Inerrancy does not demand the technical language of modern science.
c. Inerrancy does not exclude the use of figures of speech: Personification, hyperbole, metaphors, similes, allegories.

4. The Bible can be inerrant even if the NT includes loose or free quotations from the OT.

5. Inerrancy does not demand that the sayings of Jesus always contain the exact words \textit{(ipsissima verba)} of Jesus, only the exact voice \textit{(ipsissima vox)}.

6. Inerrancy does not guarantee the exhaustive comprehensiveness of any single account or of combined accounts where those are involved.

V. THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE
(often referred to in the tradition as “perspicuity.”)

A. Definition

“Through the Holy Spirit, Scripture communicates sufficiently clearly to guide one with faith to knowledge of what is pleasing to God” (Yocum, DTIB, 728).

B. Further Explanation

Luther identified two different aspects of Scripture’s clarity \textit{(The Bondage of the Will)}:
1. Internal Clarity – the Holy Spirit ministers to the willing heart as Scripture is read, bringing about understanding of the text’s meaning and conviction concerning its application.

2. External Clarity – the meaning of Scripture is found via the application of the normal rules of language use.

C. Theological Questions

1. What exactly does the clarity of Scripture guarantee?

2. Why are there still many disagreements concerning the meaning of various Scriptures?

VI. THE PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

A. Introduction to Preservation

1. The basic issue is, what do the Scriptures promise (if anything) concerning their own preservation through the processes of transmission (from one generation to the next) and translation (from one language to another)?

2. Are there clear promises of such a preservation in Scripture?

3. If so, does Scripture affirm that it will be preserved miraculously by God?

4. Does Scripture promise that it will be preserved through one manuscript, one set of manuscripts, one Greek edition?

B. Explanation of Preservation

- Westminster Confession: “The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, being immediately inspired by God and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in ages, are therefore authentical; so in all controversies of religion, the church is to finally appeal to them.”

- The original words could have become lost, garbled, or destroyed, and God preserved the text. But the questions are, to what detail has He preserved the original (perfect?); how has
he preserved the original (one manuscript/version, or many?); and in what way has he preserved the original (miraculously or providentially)?

C. The Providential Nature of Preservation

1. Proof texts for miraculous preservation are taken out of context.
   a. Psalm 12:6 (NASB) The words of the Lord are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. 7 Thou, O Lord, wilt keep them; Thou wilt preserve him from this generation forever.
   b. Psalm 119:89 (NASB) Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.
   c. Psalm 119:152 (NASB) Of old I have known from Thy testimonies, That Thou hast founded them forever.
   d. Isa. 40:8 (NASB) The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.
   e. Matt 5:18 (NASB) “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.”
   f. Matt 24:35 (NASB) “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.
   g. Luke 16:17 (NASB) “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.
   h. 1 Pet. 1:23 (NASB) for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, [that is,] through the living and abiding word of God. 24 For, “All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, 25 But the word of the Lord abides forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.
   i. Conclusion? These verses do not promise a miraculous preservation of all of the words of Scripture.

2. God providentially has used men to preserve Scripture.
   a. God used a man to preserve the word; God was involved, but He did not intercede supernaturally to reconstitute the book from the ashes. Jer. 36:1-32
      ➢ Jer. 36:28 “Take again another scroll and write on it all the former words that were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned.”
      ➢ Deut 17:18 Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.
b. However, there may be some Old Testament words which may have been lost from our modern copies. There was no miraculous preservation.

(1) 1Sam 13:1 Saul was [forty] years old when he began to reign, and he reigned [thirty] two years over Israel.

(2) 2 Sam. 8:4 David captured from him 1,700 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers; and David hamstrung the chariot horses, but reserved [enough] of them for 100 chariots.

  Compare with 1Chron. 18:4—David took from him 1,000 chariots and 7,000 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers, and David hamstrung all the chariot horses, but reserved [enough] of them for 100 chariots.

(3) 2 Kin. 24:8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name [was] Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.

  Compare with 2 Chron. 36:9—Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.

c. Still, Scripture says that copies of Scripture are the Word of God.

  ➢ Ezra 7:14 “Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand . . . .”
  ➢ John 5:39 “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;
  ➢ Acts 17:2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and [saying], “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.”
  ➢ 2Tim 3:15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

d. Conclusion: The work of preserving the text of Scripture is basically a providential, not a miraculous, one. No biblical evidence for miraculous preservation.

e. There is compelling objective evidence, however, that the texts of both the Old and New Testaments have been providentially preserved in remarkable purity.

  ➢ 5,600 Greek mss. of New Testament; even some partial mss from 2nd century.
At least 95% of the variants are insignificant, like spelling, word order.

Bahnsen: “The providence of God superintends matters so that copies of Scripture do not become so corrupt as to become unintelligible for God’s original purposes in giving it or so corrupt as to create a major falsification of His message’s text. . .” (p. 185).

D. Canonicity

"Canon" = a rod or reed, used in the ancient world to measure. Thus, a standard or norm.

1. The need for the canon

a. The apostles were Christ’s formal, authorized, deputized representatives (John 20).

b. As the apostles died and passed out of the picture, it was important that their teaching be preserved.

c. Note that the apostles were concerned about this problem: 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15

d. The written apostolic witness became increasingly crucial.

e. In the end, God providentially preserved the apostolic writings through local churches, pastors, copyists, and church councils.

f. The doctrine of canonicity therefore deals with man’s acceptance of the apostle’s and prophets’ writings as Scripture.

2. The existence of the canon

a. The process of recognition did not establish the canon; it simply vindicated that which had been long since established.

(1) We must not think that there was no general conviction as to what was Scripture before 400.

(2) Because of heretical confusion and imperial decrees, there was much official discussion of the issue.

(3) But it is the record of that official discussion which is often mistaken for the initial and authoritative establishment of the canon.

b. Point: We must not confuse the existence of the canon (God’s action) with the church’s recognition of the canon. Statements of church fathers, decrees of councils, etc. concerning the contents of the NT do not create the Canon.
3. The recognition of the OT canon
(See Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 127-207)

   a. The Old Testament canon was functionally established by Ezra in the fifth century B.C.

   b. The Scriptures accepted by Israel are the same as the Christian Old Testament

   c. There are three steps generally recognized as the process through which the Old Testament canon was established:

     (1)

     (2)

     - Group internal testimony
     - Especially certain when one prophet recognized another prophet. For example: Jer 26:18 Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus the Lord of hosts has said, “Zion will be plowed [as] a field, And Jerusalem will become ruins, And the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.”

     (3)

     - Dan. 9:2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was [revealed as] the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, [namely], seventy years. 3 So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek [Him by] prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.

4. What about the "Apocrypha" (Deuterocanon)?
(cf. Grudem, 59)

   a. Don't claim authority like the OT

   b. Jewish originators didn't consider them God's words

   c. Jesus and NT authors didn't consider them Scripture

   d. Some teachings contradict Scripture
5. The recognition of the NT canon

a. The New Testament canon was established in the first century, but the historical recognition of that canon was a process which took some time.

b. We have to be careful in discussing how to recognize the New Testament canon that we don’t impose rationalistic criteria.

“In the final analysis, the attempt to demonstrate criteria of canonicity seeks, from a position above the Canon, to rationalize or generalize about the Canon. . . . Instead we must recognize the New Testament canon as a self-establishing, self-validating entity. (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “The New Testament: How Do We Know For Sure?” CT, (Feb. 1988, 28-29).

c. Inductively, the following criteria describe how the New Testament canon was recognized.

(1) The Competency Principle: Only God is adequate to witness to Himself

   Heb. 6:13: For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself. . . .

(2) The Chronological Principle: God limited canonicity by announcing the close of the Old and New Testaments.

   (a) The Old Testament announcement: Mal. 4:4-6—Elijah the next prophet

   Mal. 4:4 “Remember the law of Moses My servant, [even the] statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. 6 “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to [their] children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

   (b) The New Testament announcement:

   Revelation 22:18: “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”
Robert Thomas: “The part played by the warning of Rev. 22:18 in [the] decline and cessation [of prophetic/revelatory activity at the end of the first century AD] should not be overlooked. . . . This was perhaps the most basic reason of all. The warning must be understood in light of the prophetic focus of the times. Ample reasons existed for John to conclude that no more prophecy was needed. . . . [Rev. 22:18-19] is a divine proclamation terminating use of the gift [of prophecy]” (JETS: 6 /89, 215-16).

This principle goes with the next principle—that only apostles and prophets under the supervision of apostles could write Scripture. Cf. 1 Cor. 14:37-38.

(3) The Credential Principle: God produced canonical books through the agency of an authenticated prophet or apostle—1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 14:37-38

1Cor. 2:10 For to us God revealed [them] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the [thoughts] of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the [thoughts] of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual [thoughts] with spiritual [words].

(a) In the Old Testament, this would mean, produced through the agency of an authenticated prophet.

- Harris, concerning the Pentateuch: “… ancient Israel believed that Moses wrote it as the spokesman for God. There is no dissenting voice. And is it not clear that this is precisely why ancient Israel received it as authoritative, i.e., canonical? It was not canonized because of its antiquity, linguistic phenomena, beautiful style, royal imposition, or ecclesiastical decision. The principle for canonizing the Pentateuch which guided ancient Israel, as far as we have any evidence at all, is, Was it form God’s great spokesman,
Moses? The human author, admitted by all to be a spokesman for the divine Author, guaranteed the writing” (159).

- “Similarly, succeeding prophets were received upon due authentication, and their written works were received with the same respect, being received therefore as the Word of God” (167).
- “What was prophetic was regarded as the Word of God. What was not prophetic was . . . not regarded as the Word of God. The canon grew as the prophets succeeded one another in their ministry; it was finished, as Josephus says, when the Holy Spirit ceased speaking through prophets in Israel. . . . when all the tests [of a prophet] were applied and a prophet was acknowledged to be true, his words and writings were received forthwith by the faithful as from God, i.e., canonical” (175).

(b) In the New Testament, this would mean, produced through the agency or authority of an authenticated apostle.

- Harris: “It is thus obvious that a test for inspiration is ready to hand in the New Testament age. The teaching of an apostle was received, and was intended to be received, simply because he was an apostle commissioned of Christ. As in the case of the Old Testament prophet, what he wrote was naturally as authoritative as what he spoke, and, therefore, any production of an apostle would at once be accepted as divine” (233).

(4) The Consistency Principle: God superintended all canonical books so that they were totally harmonious with previous revelation.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily [to see] whether these things were so.


- This work of the Spirit is a corporate matter on all Christians, and is a kind of corporate internal testimony.
- There has been “stunning unanimity”—”Ask any Christian community.”
“[T]he gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. . . . Always the most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God” (A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 7).

I. OPEN THEISM: POSTCONSERVATIVE THEOLOGY PROPER

Erickson: “The doctrine of God has become the focus of more intense attention in recent years on the part of postconservative evangelical theologians than virtually any other doctrine” (*Left*, 87).

A. God is love

Richard Rice: “. . . love is the most important quality we attribute to God. . .” (*The Openness of God*, 15).

“Love is the essence of the divine reality, the basic source from which all of God’s attributes arise. This means that the assertion *God is love* incorporates all there is to say about God.” (*Openness*, 21).

B. God is mutable and passible

The classical view of the nature of God is more the product of Greek philosophy than Scriptural teaching.

Gregory Boyd: “the fundamental vision of the process world view, especially as espoused by Charles Hartshorne, is correct” (*Trinity and Process*, Preface, quoted in Erickson, *Left*, 91).

C. God is "open" to the future

“Postconservative theologians are moving away from classical theism and toward an ‘open view of God’” (Olson, “Postconservative,” 481).

1. God does not control the details of the universe.

   Gregory Boyd: “There is no single, all-determinative divine will that coercively steers all things. . .” (*God At War*, 20).

   Boyd: “. . . neither Jesus nor his disciples seemed to understand God’s absolute power as absolute control. They prayed for God’s will to be done on earth, but this assumes that they understand that God’s will was not yet being done on earth (Mt 6:10). Hence neither Jesus nor his disciples assumed that there had to be a divine purpose behind all
events in history. Rather, they understood the cosmos to be populated by a myriad of free agents, some human, some angelic, and many of them evil” (*War*, 53).

Boyd: “... God, for whatever reasons, designed the cosmos such that he does not necessarily always get his way...” (*War*, 47).

2. God does not exhaustively know the future.

Richard Rice: “God knows a great deal about what will happen. He knows everything that will ever happen as the direct result of factors that already exist. He knows infallibly the content of his own future actions, to the extent that they are not related to human choices. Since God knows all possibilities, he knows everything that could happen and what he can do in response to each eventuality. And he knows the ultimate outcome to which he is guiding the course of history. All that God does not know is the content of future free decisions, and this is because decisions are not there to know until they occur” (*The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, edited by Clark Pinnock, 134).

II. THE EXISTENCE AND KNOWABILITY OF GOD

A. The Incomprehensibility of God

1. Definition

"Because God is infinite and humans are finite, human beings can never fully understand God" (Grudem, 149).

“God is a being who exists in eternity, free of all the limitations of time and space. In his being (or essence) he is different from us or from anything else in the created order, and is therefore fundamentally unknowable” (Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 110).

2. Biblical basis

   - **Ps 145:3** – “His greatness is unsearchable.”
   - **Isa 40:28** – “There is no limit to His understanding.” (HCSB)
   - **Rom 11:34** – “Who has known the mind of the Lord?”

   Contrast with **Ps 139:1**

3. Explanation
B. Traditional “Proofs” for God

1. The background of the proofs

   a. The proofs for the existence of God have been constructed by philosophers and theologians at various times in history to persuade people that it is not rational to reject God’s existence.

   b. The rational arguments for God in a Christian perspective were first systematized by Thomas Aquinas (1226-74)

   c. Thomas revolutionized theology by accepting the rational method of Aristotelianism and arguing that the existence of God can be proved by arguments drawn from the physical universe. Therefore, they are empirical and \textit{a posteriori} arguments.

   d. Thomas’ system was the highest expression of scholasticism, the teaching of the great medieval schools.

2. The content of the proofs

   a. Cosmological Argument

      (1) Statement of the proof

         (2) Strengths and weaknesses

   b. Teleological Argument
(1) Statement of the proof

(2) Strengths and weaknesses

c. Anthropological (Moral) Argument
   (1) Statement of the proof

   (2) Strengths and weaknesses

d. Ontological Argument
   (1) Form I

   (2) Form II
3. Evaluating the proofs

a. They show that theistic belief is not irrational.

Grudem: “They are valid in that they correctly evaluate the evidence and correctly reason to a true conclusion—in fact, the universe *does* have God as its cause, and it *does* show evidence of purposeful design. . . . The actual facts referred to in these proofs, therefore, are true and in that sense the proofs are valid. . . . But in another sense, if ‘valid’ means ‘able to compel agreement even from those who begin with false assumptions,’ then of course none of these proofs is valid because not one of them is able to compel agreement from everyone who considers them” (144).

b. However, these arguments lead at best to high probability; at worst, the lead to an idol.

J. O. Buswell: “these arguments do establish a presumption in favor of faith in the God of the Bible. . . . We are in a world where sin and misery abound. The Christian Gospel might be true. The evidence is strong enough so that we are morally culpable if we fail to give heed. Indeed the evidence, compared with evidence in other matters, is overwhelming, so that Paul is justified in saying that those who have the evidence and who do not accept of the grace of God are without excuse (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 100).

c. Theologically, the rational arguments could tend to minimize the seriousness of sin in the heart and mind of mankind.

d. Depending on how they are used, the arguments could imply that God’s revelation of Himself is not sufficient.

“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. . . . If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, *neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead*” (Luke 16:30-31).

e. Rather than rationalizing God’s existence to the unbeliever by means of human wisdom, the Christian must reason from Scripture, not to it.

John R. W. Stott: “In evangelism, then, we shall need to recognize that the men to whom we preach have minds. We shall not ask them to stifle their minds, but to open them, and in particular to open them to receive a divine illumination in order to understand the divine revelation. We shall not seek to murder their intellect (since it was given to them by God), but neither shall we flatter it (since it is finite and fallen). We shall endeavour to reason with them, but only from revelation, the while

C. The General Revelation of God

1. Definition

   *General revelation is the disclosure of God in nature and the constitution of man whereby all people gain an introductory knowledge of God.*

2. The revelation of God in nature

   a. The impact on the unbeliever

   *Rom 1:18-21*

   (1)

   (2)

   (3)

   (4)

   b. The impact on the believer

   *Ps 19:1-6*

   (1)

   (2)

   (3)
3. The revelation of God in man's constitution

Rom 2:14-15

a. Pagan non-Jews showed by their actions that they generally knew the difference between right and wrong.

b. Even though they had never seen the Scriptures their morality demonstrated that God had placed His law of right and wrong in their hearts.

c. Their conscience operated on the basis of this inner law.

d. Their conscience either approved their doing right, or accused them when they did wrong.

4. Why is it "general"?

a. This knowledge about God is universally available.

(1)

(2)

(3)

b. This knowledge about God is introductory.
5. Summary: the impact of general revelation

6. Can people come to a saving knowledge of God through general revelation alone?
   a. Scripture nowhere teaches with reasonable clarity that general revelation brings persons to a saving knowledge of God.
      
      *Ps 19:7-11*

      What about Melchizedek (Gen 14:17ff)?

   b. Scripture teaches that “no one seeks after God” (Rom 3:11-12).
      What about the idols and sacrifices of the heathen?

      Other world religions?

      What about Cornelius?

   c. Scripture teaches that general revelation is partial, obscured by sin. (cf. Rom 8:19-22)
d. Scripture teaches that the result of General Revelation is the condemnation of the sinner (Rom 1:18-21)

e. Scripture teaches that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. John 14:6

f. Scripture teaches that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Rom 10:9-10, 13, 17.

D. The Special Revelation of God

1. Definitions of special revelation

   Erickson, 175: “By special revelation we mean God’s manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him.”

   Lewis and Demarest, 100: “. . . God’s free and personal communication of himself that offers persons privileged communication with the Creator. . . .”

   Pettegrew: Special Revelation is God’s personal disclosure of Himself to us through the Living and Written Word so that we might come to know Him in salvation and glorify Him through our lives.

2. The personal nature of special revelation:

   He tells us His name.

   He enters into personal relationships with us (covenants, etc.)

   He makes himself known to us in ways we can grasp and understand (accommodation).

   He is “made in the likeness of sinful flesh” in order to fully identify with us.

   But also note that when we say special revelation is personal, we do not mean that the message about God is somehow subjective, or based on a mystical relationship. Our saving knowledge of God is based on propositional truth.

3. Types of special revelation

   a. The Living Word, Jesus Christ

      (1) Col 2:9 – “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”
(2) 

Heb 1:1-3

(3) 

- Heb 1:1-3
- John 14:8-9 — “He who has seen Me has seen the Father;”

b. The Written Word

Scriptures include the following specific kinds of revelation:

(1) Divine Speech — “Thus saith the Lord”

(2) Dreams and visions — Gen 28:10-17

(3) Theophanies and Christophanies — Gen 16:7-13

(4) Internal thoughts to prophets and apostles — 1 Cor 2:6-13


(6) Jesus’ Life and Teaching — John 20:30-31

(7) Miraculous acts of God — Exod 14:13-31

c. Miracles as special revelation of God

(1) Do miracles break the “laws of nature”?

(2) What is the biblical terminology for miracles?

“Often ‘signs and wonders’ is used as a stock expression to refer to miracles (Exod 7:3; Deut 6:22; Ps 135:9; Acts 4:30; 5:12; Rom 15:19; et al.), and sometimes all three terms are combined, ‘mighty works and wonders and signs’
(Acts 2:22) or ‘signs and wonders and mighty works’ (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4)” (Grudem, 356).

(a) Miracle (or Mighty Work, or Power, Luke 1:35)—an unusually powerful work of God . . .

(b) Wonder—an event “that causes people to be amazed or astonished.” Used in verb form for people’s reaction to miracles.

(c) Sign

(i) It points to God’s activity
   “God also testifying with them. . . .”
   Means “something that points to or indicates something else, especially (with reference to miracles) God’s activity and power” (Grudem, 356).

(ii) It points to attestation and authenticity.
   John frequently uses the word, “work,” to speak of miracles, almost always with the idea of authentication (e.g., John 5:36)

(3) Does the Bible teach that miracles were revelational?

Exod 5:1-2: Exodus miracles meant to answer Pharaoh’s question, “Who is Yahweh?”

Joshua 4:23-24: Dried up Jordan, “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty. . . .”

John 10:38: The miracles demonstrated “that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

So, in most cases, a miracle is an unusually powerful work of God that amazes people, reveals God, and authenticates His revelation and revelation bearer.

(4) What are the limitations of miracles as revelation?

(a) Accessibility

(b) Content
III. THE DIVINE NATURE

A. God is Personal

1. Intellect
   *God knows and understands*
   a. knowledge, understanding, wisdom (Rom 11:33)
   b. wisdom in creation (Ps 104:24)
   c. wisdom in salvation (1 Cor 1:24-25)

2. Will
   *God acts with a sense of*
   a. Eph 1:5-6; 3:11
   b. Isa 43:1-7

3. Emotions
   *God displays dispositions and emotions appropriate to*
   See “Impassible” under The Divine Attributes.

4. Self-consciousness
   *God reveals himself as a*
   a. identifies himself by name (Exod 3:14)
   b. is jealous for his name (Isa 42:8)
5. Relatedness

*God enters into relationships with*

a. makes

b. hears

c. blesses the

d. judges the

B. God is an Infinite Spirit

1. Noncorporeal – God’s essence does not include

a. John 4:24


c. Philosophical complications

2. Unextended – God does not

see “Omnipresent” under Divine Attributes

3. Invisible – God cannot be

a.

b.
4. Incorruptible – God cannot
   see “Omnitemporal” under Divine Attributes

5. Indivisible – God is not
   a. All of God’s attributes describe all of God
   b. Classical doctrine of divine simplicity –

6. Self-existent – God cannot not exist; his existence is not contingent (classical attribute of aseity)

C. **God is a Trinity**
   1. Classical Theological Terminology
      a. Words for the Oneness of God
         (1) Substantia
         (2) Ousia
         (3) Essentia
      b. Words for the Threeness of God
         (1) Persona
         (2) Hypostasis
(3) Substitentia

2. The Unity (Oneness) of God

a. Definition

There is but one essence in the Godhead and this one essence wholly and equally pervades each of the three persons in the Godhead without division or multiplication.

b. Explanation

(1)

(2)

(3)

c. Biblical teaching

(1)

(a) The Father is God

(b) The Son is God

John 1:1 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Titus 2:13 – “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”

Heb 1:8 – But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.”

(c) The Holy Spirit is God

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?
(2)

(a) The Father and the Son are One
   \textit{John 10:30-33} “I and the Father are one.”

(b) The Father and the Spirit are One
   \textit{1 Cor 3:16} “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

(c) The Son and the Spirit are One
   \textit{Rom 8:9} “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

(d) The Father, Son, and Spirit are One
   \textit{John 14:16-23} “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.”

3. The Trinity (Threeness) of God
   “Sadly, many nominally orthodox Christians are unitarian in all but name. They regard the Father as God, Jesus as divine but somehow inferior to God, and the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force, whom they may quite happily refer to as ‘it.’” (Bray, 124)

   a. Definition
      \textbf{God is three persons in one essence. The Divine essence subsists wholly and indivisibly, simultaneously and eternally, in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.}
      This is not a contradiction – God is one and three at the same time but not in the same sense.

   b. Biblical Evidences for Trinitarianism
      “The doctrine of the Trinity is in the Bible as humid air. The cool wave of reflection through which the church passed, condensed its thought and precipitated what all along had been in solution” (Wiley, 1:393).

      (1) Old Testament hints at divine threeness
(a)

(b) 

Gen 20:13 – “and it came about, when God caused me to wander”
Gen 35:7 – “there God had revealed himself to him.”
2 Sam 7:23 “And what one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods?”

(c) 

Gen 1:26 – “Let us make man in our image.”
Gen 3:22 – “Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”
Isa 6:8 – “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

(d) 

Psa 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

(e) 

Isa 48:16 – “Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.
Isa 61:1-7 – “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor”

(f) 

Gen 22:15-16
Num 22:22-35
(g) 

Isa 9:6 – “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Strong: “While they [the OT intimations] do not by themselves furnish a sufficient basis for the doctrine of the trinity, they contain the germ of it, and may be used in confirmation of it when its truth is substantially proved from the New Testament.”

(2) Direct (formulaic) references to the Trinity in the New Testament.

(a) The baptismal formula—Matt 28:19

(b) The apostolic benediction—2 Cor 13:14

(c) Note: 1 John 5:7 is a textual problem

(3) Indirect references to the Trinity in the New Testament

(A. W. Wainwright, The Trinity in the New Testament, says that there are 14 such references.)

(a) The Epistles

Rom 15:16 – “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that [my] offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

Rom 15:30 – “Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”

2 Cor 1:21 – “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave [us] the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”

Eph 2:18 – “for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.”

(b) The Gospel of John

“Indeed, the fourth gospel is in parts virtually a trinitarian tract” (Bray, 148).

(4) The mystery of Unity and Trinity

We can only affirm the biblical truth of divine oneness and threeness. There is mystery here that is impenetrable to human rational powers. On Scripture’s affirmation of the mystery of Unity and Trinity in God: “The Trinity is asserted, but the Unity is not obscured; the Unity is confessed, but without denial of the Trinity. No figures of speech, no unnatural modes of interpretation, are resorted to, to reconcile these views with human conceptions, which they must infinitely transcend. This is the character of the heresies which have arisen on this subject. They all spring from the attempt to make this mystery of God conceivable by the human mind, and less a stone of stumbling to the pride of reason” (R. Watson 1833, 240).

c. The Trinity and the New Covenant

(1)

(2)

(a) Jesus is presented in the Gospels as God in the flesh.

_Matt 1:23_ – “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

_Mark 2:5_ – “And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

(b) The Holy Spirit is revealed more clearly in the early ministry of Christ.

_Matt 1:20_ – “But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

_Matt 3:11_ – “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

_Matt 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;

_John 14:15-17, 25-26; 16:12-15_

(c) Thus, the full revelation of the Trinity seems to be closely tied in with the New Covenant gospel.

Bray, 141: “...there is a very good theological reason for not accepting Old Testament texts as evidence for the existence of a trinity of persons in God. To admit belief in the Trinity without belief in Christ would be to confuse irretrievably the logic and purpose of revelation... The persons of
the Trinity must certainly be distinguished from their work, but in the scheme of revelation they can never be separated from it. To know the Trinity is to know the gospel, to have passed from the old dispensation to the new. It is therefore not surprising that we find no clear evidence for such a doctrine in the Old Testament. . . .”

(3) 

**John 15:15** – “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

(a) In the Old Testament, those who drew near to the Father did so in fear and trembling.

(b) The veil which had divided the Holy of Holies from the people eventually was torn apart.

(4) 

**Gal 4:6** – “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

(a) Old Testament saints had only known God on the outside.

(b) Christians have the Spirit within them and know God much more intimately.

(5) 

Bray, 119: “As long as we look at God on the outside, we shall never see beyond his unity; for, as the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine realized, the external works of the Trinity are undivided. . . . This means that an outside observer will never detect the inner reality of God, and will never enter the communion with him which is promised to us in Christ. Jews may recognize God’s existence and know his law, but without Christ they cannot penetrate the mystery of that divine fellowship which Christians call the Holy Trinity.”

d. Formulation of the Doctrine of the Trinity

(Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 487-88)

(1)

(a) This means that there is only one divine essence

(b) Any view of God that has more than one essence is polytheistic.
(2)
(a) The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Father is not the Spirit.
(b) However, each divine person shares the numerically one divine essence.

(3)
(a) The divine essence is not at one time entirely manifest as the Father, and then at another moment manifest as the Son, and then later as the Spirit.
(b) Instead, all three persons exist simultaneously

(4)
(a) They all share the divine essence, and thus are coequally God in nature.
(b) There is no ontological subordination within the Godhead.

(5) There is a distinction between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity.
(a) The ontological trinity

(b) The economical trinity

(c) The economical trinity therefore

(d) Illustration: 1 Cor. 11:3
e. Theological Issue: Eternal Generation/Procession

(1) Established in the Nicene Creed and carried forward through the Reformation (e.g. WCF 2.3)

(2) Definition: The Father, by nature, eternally makes common His divine essence with the Son and Spirit.

(3) Note that the “Son” is a form of the essence, not a form or mode of the Father.

(4) Note also that the Spirit is a form of the essence, not a form or mode of the Father.

(5) Note 3 qualities of this activity:
   (a) It is a necessary act of the Father
   (b) It is an eternal act of the Father
   (c) It is a spiritual, not physical, act of the Father

(6) Suggested proof
   (a) John 8:42
   (b) John 15:26
   (c) John 3:16, and other “begotten” passages

   The translation, “begotten,” was apparently introduced by Jerome’s revision of the Old Latin. Apparently thought that monogenes had its root in monos and gennao. Thus would mean, to beget or generate. But recent linguistic studies have discovered that the word’s roots are in monos and genos, which means “class” or “kind.” Thus, monogenes doesn’t mean “only begotten,” but rather, “one of a kind.” Thus, the NIV translates correctly, “one and only Son.”
(d) For a helpful discussion of this issue, see Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 711-14; Reymond, *New Systematic*, 323-35.

D. God is Holy

1. Etymologically, the primary idea of “holiness” seems to be that of cutting off, or separation.

   “Some would connect it with an Assyr word denoting purity, clearness; most modern scholars incline to the view that the primary idea is that of cutting off or separation. Etymology gives no sure verdict on the point, but the idea of separation lends itself best to the various senses in which the word ‘holiness’ is employed” (J.C. Lambert, *ISBE*, 3:1403).

   a. Old Testament: יָדַע (qodeš)


2. Two connotations of holiness:

   a. (1) God is metaphysically separate from and greater than anyone or anything else without any necessary moral connotation.

   “Possibly its primitive meaning was to be separated, or to be elevated, or to be lofty, or something of the kind. . . . It is certain that this was not a moral idea first, but rather a physical one; at least we may say this is probable, because Phoenician gods are not moral beings, and yet in Phoenicia (Eshmunazar’s inscription) the
Isaiah 57:15  For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell [on] a high and holy place, And [also] with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.

(2) Biblically, the idea of “separation,” or “godness,” or “unapproachableness,” or even “otherness,” is most evident throughout the OT

Ezek 36:20-23

“Holiness, in short, expresses a relation, which consists negatively in separation from common use, and positively in dedication to the service of J [Jehovah]” (J. Skinner, Dictionary of the Bible, 395).

(3) So, many theologians have recognized that the primary idea of holiness is not moral purity, but godness, otherness.

b.

(1) God is morally separate from and purer than everything and everyone else.

(2) When referring to Yahweh in the Old Testament, the term had a fuller connotation than when it was applied to pagan gods.

Psalm 89:35  “Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.”

(3) Eventually, holiness came to connote separation from moral wickedness, thus moral purity.

1 Peter 1:15  but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all [your] behavior; 16 because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”
“Holiness is that self-affirmed quality of God which embodies the totality of His unique ‘Godness’ and sets Him apart from all that is created and mundane both in being and character. God’s holiness in being is demonstrated by His ineffable majesty. God’s holiness in character finds expression in His inviolable purity” (Beacham).

“Taking the divine holiness in this form, we can easily perceive that it is not really an attribute to be coordinated with the other attributes distinguished in the divine nature. It is something co-extensive with and applicable to everything that characterizes Him and reveals Him, holy in His goodness and grace, no less than in His righteousness and wrath” (G. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 267).

**IV. THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES**

**A. Introduction: On Describing God**

1. Historic approaches to describing God
   
   a. Way of negation (*via negativa*)

   b. Way of eminence (*via eminentiae*)

   c. Evaluation and alternative

2. Classifying the attributes

3. On transcendence and immanence
B. God is Self-Existent

1. Definition

   God depends on nothing else for existence, but has eternally existed without any external or prior cause

2. Biblical rationale

   He alone is the

   He is prior to

   He is self-sufficient

C. God is Omnibenevolent

   (A cluster of divine attributes centering on the love of God)

   1. Compassionate

      a. Definition

         God shows favor to those who are

      b. Biblical rationale

         God has mercy on sinners

         God has mercy on his people

         Jesus had compassion on the suffering

         One of the most prolific attributes of God
2. Gracious

a. Definition

God shows goodness toward the ill-deserving; unmerited favor

b. Biblical rationale

“Noah found favor” (Gen 6:8)

Often parallel to mercy (Ps 31:9; Eph 2:4-5)

“The God of all grace” (1 Pet 5:10)

Included in nearly all NT epistolary greetings and/or closings

c. Theological categories of grace

(1) common grace

God’s goodness and patience in sustaining creation in general and mankind in particular

(2) saving grace

God’s goodness extended to the elect to establish a harmonious relationship in place of spiritual enmity
(3) sanctifying grace
   God’s goodness extended to his people to equip and strengthen them to follow him faithfully

3. Patient
   a. Definition
      *God delays his wrath and pours out his love and grace on creation while sinners are brought to repentance*

   b. Biblical rationale
      God chose to sustain creation after the Fall
      “Overlooked” sin while redemptive plan unfolds (Acts 17:30; Rom 3:25)
      Provides opportunity to repent (2 Pet 3:9, 15)

4. Kind (*hesed*)
   a. Definition

   b. Biblical rationale
      Often associated with
      Typically focused on
      Steadfastness
      Kindness/mercy
5. Faithful/True
   a. Definition
      \textbf{God is the only authentic God, and all that he says and does is }

   b. Biblical rationale
      
      (1)
      Isaiah 44:14-20
      1 Thess 1:9

      (2)
      Titus 1:2
      Ps 119:145-152

      (3)
      Often paired with \textit{hesed} (Ps 40:10-11)
      1 Thess 5:24
      1 John 1:9

6. Summary: God is love
D. God is Righteous

1. Definition:
   *God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.*

2. Biblical rationale
   a. God epitomizes that which is right
      
      Deut 32:4
      
      Ps 11:7
      
      Ps 19:9
      
      Ps 145:17
   
   b. One who obeys God is a “righteous one” (Ps 34 and throughout the OT)
   
   c. Jesus is **THE** righteous one (1 Pet 3:18)

3. Question: What makes certain actions right and others wrong?
   a. Realist view:
   
   b. Nominalist view:
Grudem: “But why is whatever conforms to God’s moral character right? It is right because it conforms to God’s moral character! If indeed God is the final standard of righteousness, there can be no standard outside of God by which we measure righteousness or justice. He himself is the final standard” (204).

Related questions:

Can God do things that we can’t?

Does the end justify the means for Him?

Can God deceive?

E. God is Just

1. Definition

   God’s official righteousness in that He requires other moral agents to adhere to His standard.

2. Biblical rationale

   a. God’s judgment is final and correct (Rom 2:5; 2 Thess 1:5)

   b. God will punish evil (punitive justice)

      Righteousness requires that sin be punished (Ps 7; 2 Thess 1:5-10)

      Dan 9:14
c. God will reward good (remunerative justice)
   Generally, the righteous receive good from God (Prov 13:19)
   God rewards according to deeds (Ps 62:12; cf. Prov 24:12)
   But justice must be viewed from God’s perspective on time (Ps 37:1-13; Jam 5:1-12)

F. God is Immutable

1. Definition
   God is unchangeable in his essence, character, and will.

2. Biblical rationale
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
   f.
3. The Debate

a. Classical theology has taught that God is utterly incapable of any change at all.

b. The Bible, however, does speak of God changing His mind (Jonah 3:10; Exodus 32:10-14; Judges 2:18; Psalm 18:26-27; 106:45; Jeremiah 26:19; Amos 7:3)

c. What about the incarnation?

d. What about God’s personal interactions with people?

e. Open theists repudiate divine immutability, arguing that God genuinely interacts with human beings.
   Instead of being immutable, God is “an eternally on-going event, and an event which is dynamic and open. . . eternally room for expansion.” (Boyd, *Trinity and Process*, 386)

Nash, *The Concept of God*, 100: “Theists seem to be stuck between a rock and a hard place. If God is immutable, He cannot be the religiously available God of the Scriptures. But if God is religiously available, He cannot be the unchanging God of the philosophers.”

4. Question: how do we understand the biblical accounts of divine “change?”

a. Classical theism overburdens the biblical account

b. Divine change is in context of personal relationships

Conclusion: God is unchangeable in his essence, character, and will.
G. God is Impassible

1. Definition
   a. Best definition: “All God’s actions flow from his own will; no experience can be imposed upon him from an external force.”

   b. Impassibility (\(\hat{a} \pi \alpha \vartheta \eta \zeta\)) is defined lexically as “incapable of suffering.” (BAGD, 79)

   c. The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, following the Westminster Confession and other earlier theologians states that God is “a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions . . .” (LBCF2, II.1; in Lumpkin, 248), yet this is left largely unexplained.

2. Biblical rationale
   a. Scripture shows God having emotions

      (1) Love

      (2) Delight

      (3) Pleasure

      (4) Anger

      (5) Hatred

      (6) Sorrow
b. Yet Scripture teaches that God transcends some of the human characteristics associated with emotions

- Obsession
- Greed
- Fits of anger
- Malice
- Despair

3. Theological debate: Are God’s “emotions” anthropopathisms?

a. Many classical theologians have viewed these terms as figurative.

*Genesis 6:6*—“the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”

Calvin comments, “Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God’s hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity.” (*Genesis*, 249)

In another place, Calvin writes, “Although he is beyond all disturbance of mind, yet he testifies that he is angry toward sinners. Therefore whenever we hear that God is angered, we ought not to imagine any emotion in him, but rather to consider that this expression has been taken from our own human experience; because God, whenever he is exercising judgment, exhibits the appearance of one kindled and angered.” (*Institutes*, I.XVII.13)

b. Openness theologians have argued that we should take these expressions of emotion by God as genuine and literal, not as anthropopathisms.

Gregory Boyd writes, “[L]anguage about God ‘changing his mind,’ ‘regretting,’ and so on should be taken no less literally than language about God ‘thinking,’ ‘loving,’ or ‘acting justly.’” (*God of the Possible*, 170 n. 2)

c. Mediating view that God does have emotions such as love and anger, and does genuinely grieve over sin. These are genuine emotions not anthropopathisms.

John Feinberg: “In light of the nuanced understanding of divine immutability, it is necessary to reject divine impassibility” (277).

Robert Reymond: “Thus whenever divine impassibility is interpreted to mean that God is impervious to human pain or incapable of empathizing with human grief it must be roundly denounced and rejected. When the Confession of Faith declares
that God is “without…passions” it should be understood to mean that God has no bodily passions such as hunger or the human drive for sexual fulfillment…” (179)

4. Conclusion
   a. God is not
   b. Emotions are
   c. God’s emotions are not
   d. God’s emotions move him to
   e. God is impassible in the sense that he is unassailable.

Reymond: “We do, however, affirm that the creature cannot inflict suffering, pain, or any sort of distress upon him against his will. In this sense God is impassible.” (179)

D. A. Carson writes, “If God loves, it is because he chooses to love, if he suffers, it is because he chooses to suffer. God is impassible in the sense that he sustains no ‘passion,’ no emotion, that makes him vulnerable from the outside, over which he has no control, or which he has not foreseen.” (Love of God, 60)

H. God is Omnipresent

1. Definition

   **God is personally present at every point in the universe.**

More traditional alternative: God is present in the totality of his being every place in space.

Similar to attribute of “immensity”: God transcends the physical dimensions of the created universe; God does not “take up” space.
2. Biblical rationale
   a. 
      Jer. 23:23
      
      Ps. 139:7-12
   b. 
      1 Kings 8:27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!”

3. Theological questions
   a. How can God fill any space since He doesn’t have a body?
   b. Is God in hell and inside of unbelievers?
   c. Why does Scripture say that God is present in heaven, when He is present everywhere? Matthew 6:9—“Our Father who is in heaven.”
I. **God is Eternal**

1. Definition

   *God is not limited by the passage of time: he does not age, forget, or grow impatient as he participates in the outworking of his plan for redemptive history.*

2. Summary of biblical evidence

   a. God existed before the created order (Gen 1:1; Ps 90:2)

   b. God’s actions stem from his pre-creation purposes (1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:4)

   c. God will never go out of existence (Ps 9:7; Ps 60:19-20; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16)

   d. God does not age (Ps 102:25-27)

   e. God does not grow weary or impatient (2 Pet 3:8)

   f. Biblical summary: God’s existence is eternal in that it transcends time. Whether this eternal existence is temporal or timeless is not specified.

   g. Preliminary conclusion: God acts in the time-space universe and interacts with his creatures

3. View #1: God is atemporal (timeless)

   - Explanatory demand: to give as full an account as possible of divine transcendence
   
   - Key concept: Since God absolutely transcends the created order, he has neither temporal location nor temporal extension

   a. Argument from Creator-creature distinction

      (1) God fundamentally transcends the created order

      (2) Time is a feature of the created order

      (3) Therefore, time is not a feature of God’s experience
b. Argument from perfection

(1) God has the most perfect existence in every way

(2) It is better (i.e., more perfect) to possess all of one’s experiences rather than lose them to the past or anticipate them in the future

(3) Temporal existence necessarily involves the experience of past and future

(4) Temporal existence is thus less perfect

(5) Therefore, God cannot be temporal

c. Argument from divine simplicity

(1) God is not made up of components

(2) Temporal existence necessarily divides one’s existence into temporal components

(3) The consciousness of one with temporal existence thus is divided into components

(4) Therefore, God cannot have temporal existence

d. Argument from omnipresence

(1) God transcends time in the same way that he transcends space

(2) God is at every point in space equally (i.e., in the totality of his being)

(3) By analogy, God is at all points in time equally (i.e., past, present, and future)

4. View #2: God is omnitemporal (everlasting)

Explanatory demand: to give as full as possible an account of the biblical presentation of nature, attributes, and actions of God.
Key concept: The tri-personal God who is Lord of space and time has entered into them in order to enact his purposes for them.

a. Argument from personhood

(1) A timeless being cannot possess the attributes of personhood

(2) Scripture describes God literally/analogically in terms of personhood

(3) Therefore, God cannot be timeless

b. Argument from divine action

(1) A timeless being cannot act in time

(2) Scripture shows God acting in time

(3) Therefore, God cannot be timeless

c. Argument from perfection

(1) The ability to experience past and future is a perfection of persons

(2) God possesses all the perfections a person can possess

(3) Therefore, God experiences past and future

d. Argument from omnipresence

(1) Omnipresence is the personal presence of God at every point in space
(2) God’s relationship to time is analogous to omnipresence: God is personally present at every moment in time

5. Conclusion

J. God is Omnipotent

1. Definition

   God is all-powerful and is able to do

   Feinberg: “God is able to do everything Scripture shows him doing.”

2. Biblical rationale

   a. God’s actions flow from his purposes

      Job 42:2 “I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”

      Matthew 19:26 And looking at [them] Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

   b.

   c.
(1) Habakkuk 1:13  [Your] eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness [with favor].

(2) 2 Timothy 2:13  If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

(3) Titus 1:2  in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,

(4) James 1:13  Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

d. God cannot do things which are absurd or self-contradictory (make square circles, a married bachelor, etc.)

K. God is Omniscient

1. Definition
   God perfectly and exhaustively knows everything about himself and his creation: past, present, and future; actual and possible.

2. Biblical rationale
   a.
      1 Corinthians 2:10

   b.
(1) Inanimate creation – Ps 147:4-5

(2) Brute creation – Matt 10:29-30

(3) Men and their works–Ps. 33:13-15

(4) Men’s thoughts and hearts–Ps. 139:1-4

c.

Matt 11:21-24

d.

Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; 46:9-10

3. Theological questions

a. Question: What about the Scriptures that depict God as being ignorant of some matter?
   Deut 8:2 “You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”
   Gen 22:12 He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”
   Commenting on Gen 22:23, Gregory Boyd writes, “The verse clearly says that it was because Abraham did what he did that the Lord now knew he was a faithful covenant partner. The verse has no clear meaning if God was certain that Abraham would fear him before he offered up his son.”

(1)

1 Chronicles 28:9—“For the LORD searches all hearts, and understands all the intent of the thoughts”
Genesis 18:19—God testifies to His confidence in Abraham, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him.”

In fact the faith of Abraham before and after the test in Genesis 22 is outlined specifically in Hebrews 11:8-12, and 17-19.

(3)

“real experience in historically unfolding relationships with people, of changed dispositions or emotions in relation to some changed human situation.” (Ware)

(4)

(5)

b. Question: Is God's knowledge limited because He has no physical body?

Feinberg, 306: “Since God has no body, it seems impossible for him to have the five human senses; but then there are many things that can be known which God cannot know. . . . he doesn’t know what it is like to feel cold or hot, wet or dry. He doesn’t know what a sunset looks like, at least not as someone with physical eyes does. Since he has no ears, it also seems that he cannot hear the songs sung in his praise. Moreover, he cannot know what it is to taste food, and it is impossible for him to feel the sensation of physical pain.”

L. God is Omnisapient

1. Definition

God employs his perfect knowledge in perfectly appropriate ways in order to bring about the enactment of his eternal decree for his glory
2. Biblical rationale
   a. Wisdom of God in creation (Ps 104:24; Prov 3:19)
   
   b. Wisdom of God in redemption (1 Cor 1:21–2:7; Eph 3:10)
   
   c. Wisdom comes from God (1 Kgs 5:12; Ps 111:10 [cf. Prov 1:7; 9:10]; 2:6; Eph 1:17)
   
   d. “Wise man” is almost always used in negative sense in OT & NT

M. God is Glorious

1. Definition
   The goodness and greatness of God expressed in his attributes, manifested to his creatures, and responded to by them such that God is seen to be weighty, honored, majestic, and praiseworthy

2. Biblical rationale
   a. Associated with God’s
      (Exod 16:6-10; 40:34ff [cf. 1 Kgs 8:11]; Num 16:19)
   
   b. Associated with God’s
      (Ps 19:1)
   
   c. Associated with God’s
      (1 Sam 15:29 NET; Isa 48:9-11)
   
   d. Associated with God’s
      (Exod 33:18; Num 14:20-23; 2 Cor 4:15; Eph 1)
   
   e. Involves the people’s
(Ps 57:5, 11; 96:3-8)

f. Involves an
   (Rom 8:18-21)

3. Conclusion

N. Excursus: Is There a Primary Attribute?

1. Candidates for a “primary attribute”
   a. omnipotence/sovereignty
   b. holiness
   c. love

2. Concluding observations
   a. God's holy righteousness regulates his love –
   b. God's love regulates his holy righteousness –

Grudem: “For example, John can say that ‘God is light’ (1 John 1:5) and then a little
later say also that ‘God is love (1 John 4:8). There is no suggestion that part of God is
light and part of God is love, or that God is partly light and partly love. Nor should
we think that God is more light than love or more love than light. Rather it is God
himself who is light, and it is God himself who is also love” (178).

   c. God's attributes inhere in the divine essence –

Grudem: “all such attempts seem to misconceive of God as a combination of various
parts, with some parts being somehow larger or more influential than others.
Furthermore, it is hard to understand exactly what ‘most important’ might mean”
(180).
d. The cross emphasizes

e. OT and NT are consistent, but with

“He is the same God always, and everything he says or does is fully consistent with all his attributes” (Grudem, 180).

f. The universe does not make sense if

g. Conclusion: no primary attribute, but all of his attributes exist in

Grudem: “Every attribute of God that we find in Scripture is true of all of God’s being, and we therefore can say that every attribute of God also qualifies every other attribute” (179).

V. GOD, CREATION, AND HISTORY

A. The Decree of God

1. Theological definition

“By decrees of God we mean that eternal plan by which God has rendered certain all the events of the universe, past, present, and future.” (Strong, 353)

WCF: “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”
2. Biblical Teachings

a. God’s decree is a single, all-inclusive plan
   Eph 1:11
   See further Rom 8:28; Prov 16:33; Isa 22:11; Matt 10:30

b. God’s decree arises from his own purposes
   Eph 1:6, 11; Rom 11:34
   Rev 4:11

c. God’s decree is eternal
   Eph 3:11

d. God’s decree is certain
   Ps 33:11
   Acts 2:23
   Rom 8:29-30

3. Theological Questions

a. How is the decree of God different from fatalism?
   (1)
   (2)
b. How should we teach the doctrine of the decree?
(Strong, 369):

(1) Avoid exaggeration, obnoxious statements, theological snobbery

(2) Emphasize that the decree is not grounded in arbitrary will, but infinite wisdom.

(3) Apply truth to encourage believer and admonish unbeliever

B. Creation

1. Definition

“God, by a direct act, brought into being virtually instantaneously everything that is. Note two features of this view. One is the brevity of time involved, and hence the relative recency of what occurred at creation. . . . Another tenet of this view is the idea of direct divine working. God produced the world and everything in it, not by the use of any indirect means or biological mechanisms, but by direct action and contact” (Erickson).

Known by the term “fiat creationism”

2. The Theology of Creation

a. Creation was the work of the Triune God

(1) “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” 1 Cor 8:6

(2) “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being “ John 1:3
b. Creation was done freely as a result of God’s wisdom and will, for his own glory
   “It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his
   wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens” Jer 10:12
   “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the
   work of His hands” Ps 19:1
   “Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory,
   Whom I have formed, even whom I have made” Isa 43:7
   “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for
   You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created”
   Rev 4:11
   “Creation is not an instinctive or necessary process of the divine nature, but is the
   free act of rational will, put forth for a definite and sufficient end” Strong, 373

c. Creation is distinct from God yet always dependent on God
   (cf. discussion of transcendence and immanence)

d. God created the universe at a definite point
   Gen 1:1

   John 17:5 “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I
   had with You before the world was.”

e. God’s creation was an instantaneous creation out of nothing—ex nihilo

   (1) “In the beginning”—Gen 1:1

   (2) “Let there be... and it was so” implies ex nihilo. Gen 1:3, 6, 9, etc
(3) The heavens were created by the word of God

Ps 33:6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. 9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

(a) All things come from God

(b) Creation was by the word of God

(c) Material did not come from previous matter

f. God directly created Adam and Eve

Gen 2:7 Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Gen 2:21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

“. . . these texts are so explicit that it would be very difficult for someone to hold to the complete truthfulness of Scripture and still hold that human beings are the result of a long evolutionary process. . . . Even more impossible to reconcile with an evolutionary view is the fact that this narrative clearly portrays Eve as having no female parent. . . . But on a purely evolutionary view, this would not be possible, for even the very first female ‘human being’ would have been descended from some merely human creature that was still an animal” (Grudem, 265).
g. God’s creation produced “after its kind.” Gen 1:11, 12, etc.

h. God’s creation was perfect at the end of the creative week
   Gen 1:31  God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

i. God created the universe in a state of maturity
   (1)

   (2)

   (3)

   (4)
3. Some obvious problems for the old earth view:
   
a. Based on the least likely interpretation (historical-grammatical) of Scripture.
   
b. Denies the historic view of the church before evolution was popularized. (Would anyone have ever come up with a long-day view were it not for evolution?)
   
c. Puts the sun, moon and stars (day 4) millions of years after the creation of plants and trees.
   
d. Plants were formed on the second day, insects on the fifth, so how were plants pollinated for million of years?
   
e. Verbs in the creation account imply instantaneous rather than a long drawn out process.
   
f. The organisms over which man was to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28), were for the most part extinct by the time God told man.
   
g. Adam gave names to all the land animals God had formed, but the old earth view would say that most of those animals were extinct long before man was on the earth.

4. Can science correct Scripture (the dual revelation theory)?
   “It would follow from these [Job 12:7-8] and other verses that, in addition to the words of the Bible being ‘God-breathed, . . . useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness’ (2 Timothy 3:16), so also are the words of God spoken through the works of His hand. In other words, the Bible teaches a dual, reliably consistent revelation. . . . The facts of nature may be likened to a sixty-seventh book of the Bible. . . . Thus when science appears to conflict with theology, we have no reason to reject either the facts of nature or the Bible’s words. . . . because sound science and sound biblical exegesis will always be in harmony” (Ross, 58).

C. Divine Providence
   (a.k.a. “The Sovereignty of God”)

1. Definition

   “Providence is that continuous agency of God by which He makes all the events of the physical and moral universe fulfill the original design with which He created it” (A. H. Strong).

   Open theists teach that God has set up the universe so that “some things go contrary to what God intends and may not turn out completely as God desires. Hence God takes risks in creating this sort of world” (John Sanders, The God Who Risks, 11).

   “There is no single, all-determinative divine will that coercively steers all things” (Gregory A. Boyd, God At War, 20). “God, for whatever reasons, designed the cosmos such that he does not necessarily always get his way…” (Ibid., 47).
2. Biblical rationale
   a. Ps 103:19 “The LORD has established His throne in the heaven and His
      sovereignty rules over all.”
      Includes sustenance in general (Heb 1:3; Col 1:17)
   b. Job 37:1-13
   c. Matt 10:29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And [yet] not one of them
      will fall to the ground apart from your Father.”
   d. Ps 22:28—For the kingdom is the Lord’s. And He rules over the nations.
   e. Cyrus (Isa 45:1-5)
   f. Ps 75:6 – “For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness
      comes lifting up, but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and
      lifting up another.”
   g. Rom 8:28
      Phil 4:19
   h. Matt 6:8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need
      before you ask Him.”
   i. Matt 10:30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
      Prov 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord.
3. A Formulation of Providence

a. Theological synthesis

(1) God is self-sufficient and unable to be coerced

(2) God is incomprehensible and has an infinite perspective

(3) God is all-wise and capable of formulating the best plan for the universe

(4) God is sovereign and has the right to carry out his plan

(5) God is all-powerful and is able to carry out his plan

(6) God is all-knowing and cannot be taken by surprise

(7) God is all-good and has absolutely pure motives and actions

(8) God is loving and is committed to personal relationships

(9) Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that God is in complete control of all the events of the universe and is worthy of our trust in view of our inability to comprehend his ways.

b. Compatibilism: relating providence to free will

(1)

(2)

Feinberg: “I conclude that any theology that rules out human freedom and/or moral responsibility is deficient biblically. This doesn’t mean all our acts are free, but only that humans have the capacity for free action and that they use that capacity much of the time” (Feinberg, 678).

(3)

(a) People perform free acts when they do what they want to do, not when they have the power of unguided or libertarian free will.

(b) In actuality, the human will is constantly influenced by such powers as God, demons, world, their own nature, upbringing, etc.
(c) Still, they perform free acts when what they do flows unimpeded from their wants, desires, feelings, preferences, goals, etc.

(d) Thus, no-risk view of providence, but also freedom.

c. A question of method: decree and personal interaction

(1) Seems to be conflicting Scripture:

Scripture that God has a plan in total detail for the universe—Eph 1:11

Scripture that God’s providence is only enabling—Acts 7:51 “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.”

(2) Which takes priority?

Feinberg: “What kind of passage has precedence and should be seen as normative? . . . The answer should be clear. One should go first to passages that directly address the concept in question, for they are the basis for our fundamental understanding of the concept. We must also address the other passages, but they should be understood in light of the passages that didactively set forth the concept . . . The passages (such as Eph 1:11; Ps 115:3) that tell whether God has decreed all things and controls them are passages that directly address the kind of control God has and uses in the world, not passages that tell a story about what God did on one occasion, how some human responded, and then how God reacted to that response.” (No One Like Him, 691-92).
4. The Means of Providence

a. Occasionally - miracles

b. Usually – secondary causation
   Jer 27:8
   Luke 2:1
   Acts 2:23

c. Overall – via middle knowledge(?)
   (1) Attempted to combine strong view of human free will with the no-risk view of divine providence
   (2) Originally developed by Jesuit theologian, Luis De Molina (1535-1600), and revived recently by Alvin Plantinga.
   (3) Middle Knowledge is the knowledge that God has of all possibilities which He does not will, but which remain abstract possibilities.
   (4) God knows that given certain circumstances, a person will do a certain thing.
   (5) So God just sets up the circumstances for what He wants, and the person freely chooses to do the thing God wants.

   (6) Evaluation
5. The Nature of God’s Will
   (Cf. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 693ff.)

   a. The Problem

   b. The Distinctions

   (1) God’s moral will and God’s decretive will

      (a)
      
      Rom 12:1
      Eph 4:30

      (b)
      
      Previously discussed—Eph. 1:11

   (2) God’s perfect will and God’s permissive will

      (a)

      (b)
6. How should a Christian respond to providence?

a. Old Testament examples

Helm, p. 112: “One of the distinctive features of Old Testament piety is the recognition, on the part of certain people, that the Lord has the right to do with their lives what he has done.”

Job 1:21 He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Job 2:10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Hab 3:17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, [Though] the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls, 18 Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

b. New Testament attitudes

(1)

(2)

2 Cor 12:7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself!

(3)

Jam 4:13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are [just] a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, [you ought] to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.”

(4)

Rom 8:28-30
c. Why should we pray?
   If God knows what will happen, why are prayers necessary?
   Does God change his mind in response to prayer?
   “Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.”
   (1) Praying is a part of providence

   (2) If anyone prays, then God has ordained the prayer

   (3) God has ordained the means as well as the end

   (4) Example: Daniel 9:1-4; 16-19
      (a)
      (b)

D. The Problem of Evil
(See John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*; also see Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 777-96; *Deceived by God; The Many Faces of Evil*; John Stackhouse, *Can God Be Trusted?*; D.A. Carson, *How Long O Lord?*).

1. The problem stated: How can evil exist if God is all powerful and all good?
   a. Premise 1: If God were all-powerful, He would be able to prevent evil.
   b. Premise 2: If God were all-good, He would desire to prevent evil.
   c. Premise 3: Evil exists.
   d. Conclusion 2: Therefore, there is no all-powerful, all-good God.
2. Additional problems
   a. There are different kinds of evil.

   b. Evil often seems to be egregious

3. Guidelines for solving the problem
   a. The solution must maintain God’s sovereignty over the universe.
   b. The solution must maintain man’s freedom: he is not a puppet.
   c. The solution must maintain God’s holiness and love.
   d. The solution must not contradict any clear biblical doctrine.

4. Other models for solving the problem of evil.
   (see John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 150ff.).
   a. Evil is privation
      Augustine: “For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? ... What are called vices in the soul are nothing but privation of natural good.”
      Thus, like blindness being the absence of sightedness.
      Possible biblical counterexamples: 1 Kings 22:20; 2 Samuel 16:22; 2 Samuel 12:11; Ruth 1:13
      See also Amos 3:6; Isaiah 45:7; Deut. 3:20; Josh. 11:20; Rom. 9:18
      But also see Ezek. 33:11; Lam. 3:33; 2 Pet. 3:9
b. The Best-Possible World Defense

(1) G. W. Leibniz and others have argued that this world is the best world which God could have produced.

(2) The reason is not the weakness of God, but rather the logic of creation.

(3) But does a perfect world logically require evil?

c. The Causal Levels Defense

(1) There are two levels of activity, the divine and the human order.

(2) But these two levels do not conflict because they are of different order.

(3) Divine, primary causation ensures the performance of the action from divine level, and human causal power ensures the performance at the secondary level.

(4) This means that God so arranges and orders reality that whatever intention the creature has carries the divine intention in a wider context of meaning.

(5) But certain difficulties:

(6) Still, may be some truth in this view.

d. Character-Building Defense

(1) Sometimes called Irenaean, after Irenaeus.

(2) Argument is that man was created in a state of moral immaturity. For man to come to full maturity, it was necessary for him to undergo various forms of pain and suffering.

(3) Problems?
e. The Ex Lex Defense

(1) Gordon Clark argued that God is *ex lex*, “outside of the law.”

(2) God tells us not to kill, yet He retains for Himself the right to take human life.

(3) Morally, God, as the creator of the universe, is on an entirely different level from us, His creatures.

(4) Therefore He has a right to do many things which seem evil to us.

(5) Some truth, but main problem is our view of the law, ie., that the law reflects God’s own character.

1 Peter 1:15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all [your] behavior; 16 because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

f. Free Will Defense

(1) God ordains all the circumstances necessary for the performance of a wicked action.

(2) God does not himself perform that action.

(3) But he permits that action to take place. i.e., He does not prevent it.

(4) Thus, evil comes about by the free choice of rational creatures (Satan, Adam, us).

(5) But is not the permission of evil itself an evil?

D. A. Carson, “permission in the hands of a transcendent and omniscient God can scarcely be different from decree” (*How Long O Lord?*, 224).

(6) Moreover, Scripture frequently speaks of God as determining our free choices.

Acts 2:23; 4:27

(7) Note that Scripture never resorts to the free-will defense in any passage where the problem of evil is discussed (as Rom 9, Ps 37).

(8) However, some truth in this defense.

Acts 14:16 In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;
5. Compatibilism and the Greater Good Defense

a. Definition:

According to God’s sovereign plan, he permits his creatures to do evil, yet without incurring guilt upon himself, for a greater good that only he fully comprehends.

“God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do” (Grudem, 317). With regard to sin, God predetermines wicked events in such a way that He is not directly responsible for the wicked free acts of man.

Championed by Jonathan Edwards, The Freedom of the Will. See also John Feinberg, No One Like Him, and John Frame, The Doctrine of God.

b. Biblical rationale

(1)

Ephesians 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will

(2)

Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

Isaiah 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.

(3)

“However we understand God’s relationship to evil, we must never come to the point where we think that we are not responsible for the evil that we do, or that God takes pleasure in evil or is to be blamed for it. Such a conclusion is clearly contrary to Scripture” (Grudem, 323).

(4)

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.
Acts 2:23  this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Acts 4:27  “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”

See also the Book of Lamentations

Romans 9:18  So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

Compare 2 Sam 24:1 with 2 Sam. 24:10.

2 Sam 24:1  Now again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”

2 Sam 24:10  Now David’s heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly.”

God uses evil for his own purposes

Gen 50:20  “As for you, you meant evil against me, [but] God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

cf. the story of Job; Also 1 Kings 22:23, etc.

1 Chron 21:1  Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.

Note that this inciting of sin was a means whereby God punished Israel for its many iniquities. 2 Sam 24:12-17
(9) The mystery of divine causation

6. Why did God not prevent moral evil?

a. Feinberg: “It is my contention that if God did what is necessary to rid our world of moral evil, he would either contradict his intentions to create human beings and the world as he has; cause us to wonder if he has one or more of the attributes ascribed to him; and/or do something we would not expect or desire him to do, because it would produce greater evil than there already is” (No One Like Him, 789).

How could God rid the world of evil?

(1) He could destroy mankind.

(2) He could eliminate all objects of desire.
   But would have to destroy the world, including humans.

(3) He could remove all human desires.
   But against His intention to create humans with desires.

(4) He could keep humans from being aroused to the point where they sin.
   “The picture that comes to mind is one where our daily routines are constantly interrupted (if not stopped altogether) and new courses of action are implemented only to be interrupted and new ones implemented and interrupted ad infinitum. Life as we know it would probably come to a standstill” (Feinberg, 792).

(5) He could remove evil by erasing any willing that would produce sin.
   We could will good, but not evil.

(6) He could stop our bodily movements whenever we try to carry out evil.
b.

(1) To display his grace and mercy

Rom 3:25  whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. [This was] to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, [I say], of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Rom 5:8  But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

John 9:2  And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “[It was] neither [that] this man sinned, nor his parents; but [it was] so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

(2) To display his justice in the judgment of evil

Exod 4:21  The Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.”

7:3  “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.”

9:12  And the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

9:34  But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

Rom 9:10-24—A moral evil flowing from human decision is used by God as a punishment for other evils. The universe is a moral order in which justice reigns.

(3) To elevate the condition of redeemed mankind

1 Pet 3:18  For Christ also died for sins once for all, [the] just for [the] unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

1 Pet 1:12b  the gospel . . . things into which angels long to look.