

1 The Nature of God (1)

- Module: Philosophy
- Lesson 12

2 What is God Like?

- God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them.
Genesis 1:27
- These things you have done, and I kept silent;
you thought that I was just like you.
I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes.
Psalm 50:21

3 Should We Defend God?

- Some people argue that God does not need us to defend him, that it is presumptuous for us to speak of defending God, that thinking of defending God implies we imagine some weakness or inability in God to defend himself.
 - To seek to defend God's reputation or existence should not be a reflection of a low view of God, but rather of a love, reverence, and loyalty to him.
 - For example: What if someone were to speak poorly of my wife in my presence:
 - Would it be wrong to come to her defense even though she is quite capable of defending her own reputation?
 - If I declined to defend my wife's reputation, what might that say to her, and to others, about my loyalty and love for her?
 - God has called us to, and given us the privilege of being coworkers (2 Cor. 6:1) with him. We are called to defend God not because he needs our defense, but because it is a privilege God has given us, and because it reflects our love and devotion to him.

4 Defending the True God

- Don't fall into the trap of defending a straw man view of God.
 - God is not a superhuman. (e.g. "the Big Man upstairs")
 - God is not merely supernatural.
- For example: Richard Dawkins makes his central argument in his book The God Delusion, the question, "Who created God?" Dawkins argues against a god we ourselves do not believe in.
 - Oxford mathematician, philosopher, and Christian apologist, John Lennox, points out that Dawkins should have titled his book The Created God Delusion. But Lennox wryly suggests that no one would have bought it, because no theist believes in a created God.

5 On Knowing God

- Some argue that God is beyond our knowledge because he is infinite and we are finite.
- This fails to distinguish between knowing God truly vs. knowing God exhaustively.
 - We can know many true things about God.
 - We can never know everything about God.
- Even in the natural world there are many things we do not fully understand, yet this does not mean we are incapable of understanding anything about them.
(e. g. the workings of a jet engine, the LCD screen on our TVs, quantum mechanics.)

6 **Two Sources of Knowledge About God**

- Protestant Reformers and other Christian intellectuals spoke frequently of “two books” of God’s revelation:
 - “God has, in fact, written two books, not just one. Of course, we are all familiar with the first book he wrote, namely Scripture. But he has written a second book called creation.”
—Francis Bacon (1561-1626)—
- The “book” of General Revelation—From the created world around us and from properly functioning human reason (i.e. natural theology).
- The “book” of Special Revelation—From specific supernatural divine acts of revelation to specific individuals or people (e.g. inspiration, prophecies, visions, dreams, utterances, visitations, etc.) subsequently written and preserved in Scripture. (biblical theology)

7 **1. From General Revelation**

- For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.
(Romans 1:20)
- The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
(Psalm 19:1, 2)

8 **1. From General Revelation**

- His invisible attributes
 - Eternal Power
 - Divine nature (those properties that are necessarily possessed by divinity)
- Note: According to these verses, evidences for God’s existence and for his nature from both reason and the natural world are—
 - Clearly seen

- Understood
- Utter the glory of God and tell of his works
- Supply us with knowledge about God

9 2. From Biblical Theology

- Holiness
- Love
- His will
- Trinity
- Eternal purposes
- etc.
- (Things we cannot know from the General Revelation alone.)

10 Properties of God from General Revelation

- 1. Necessity
- 2. Aseity
- 3. Incorporeality (non-materiality)
- 4. Simplicity
- 5. Transcendence
- 6. Personality
- 7. Power
- 8. Knowledge/Wisdom
- 9. Freedom

11 1. Necessity

- Factual necessity: If God exists, then he must exist at all times, he could not have not existed, nor can he cease to exist.
 - The divine properties belong to God necessarily. (To not possess those properties means that God would not be God—would cease to exist—which God cannot do.)
- Logical necessity: It is logically necessary that God exists.
 - Expressed in the ontological argument. (If it is logically possible that a “maximally great being” exists, then he does, in fact, exist.
 - He exists in every possible world. There is no possible world in which he does not exist.

12 1. Necessity

- As a necessary being, the divine properties which God possesses he possesses necessarily. He cannot not possess them.
("He could not cease to be divine without ceasing to be God." Richard Swinburne)
 - For example:
 - Aseity
 - Omnipotence
 - Omniscience
 - Freedom
 - Transcendence

13 2. Aseity

- Aseity: from the Latin a se; by itself. Refers to God's self-existence or independence.
- "God's self existence or independence. God does not merely exist in every possible world (as great as that is), but, even more greatly, he exists in every possible world wholly independent of anything else."
(Craig and Moreland in Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview)
- God derives his existence only from himself, having no other source or cause. He possesses transcendent uniqueness. He is the ultimate reality.

14 2. Aseity

- Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the the first and the last, and there is no God besides me... Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me.
Isaiah 44:6, 9
- "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things."
Acts 17:24-25
- All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.
John 1:3

15 2. Aseity

- God is unique in his aseity. All else exists dependently (contingently).
- God is uncaused and causal.
 - God is himself uncaused, by definition. (Necessary)

- God is the first cause. (The cause of everything else that exists.)
- Dawkins' "Who caused God?" argument commits the "completist fallacy." (The fallacy that asserts that one has not explained the cause of something unless they can explain the explanation. This leads to an infinite regress of explanations, making all explanation impossible.)

16 2. Aseity

- God exists completely independently of everything else.
- The holiness (separateness or otherness) of God is entailed in his aseity.
- God doesn't need anything.
 - e.g. He does not "need" our love.

17 3. Incorporeality (Immateriality)

- God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.
John 4:24
 - God is neither a body, nor is he embodied.
 - Contra both pantheism (god is everything) and panentheism (god is in everything).
 - (In a later lesson: How we know the mind/spirit/soul exists.)

18 4. Simplicity

- Modified simplicity vs. "full blown" simplicity
 - Full blown simplicity denies any distinct attributes in God, leaves us in a condition of agnosticism about the nature of God, and appears to counter biblical truth.
 - Some form of modified simplicity appears more compatible with Scripture.
 - God is not differentiated in his essence. (He has no "parts.") But God does possess distinct properties, such as love, holiness, wisdom, etc.

19 4. Simplicity

- NOTE: If God is simple, what of the classical Christian view that God is infinite? (Remember, we learned in our lesson on the cosmological argument that an actual infinite number of things cannot exist.)
 - It is in the quantitative (mathematical) sense that an actual infinite number of things cannot exist. When we speak of God being infinite, we are not speaking quantitatively, as though God has some infinite number of differentiated parts, or some size, etc.
 - Rather, we are speaking qualitatively, of God's qualities such as love, wisdom, power, etc. being infinite, without measure or without limit.

20 4. Simplicity

- As a mind, he is simple, of one essence.

- This does not mean that he does not have distinct identifiable aspects to his nature (e. g. love, holiness, omnipotence, etc.)
- Considering the Trinity—
 - One essence
 - Three persons in one essence (the tri-personal nature of God), often expressed: “One in essence, three in person.”
 - Remember the Law of Identity (P is identical to itself and different from other things. Everything that exists has a specific nature or essence.)
- A theist, understanding the simplicity of God, denies Dawkins’ claim that God, if he existed, must necessarily be more complex than the universe he created.

21  **Next Week:**

- More on the Nature of God