

DOCTRINE OF THE ESSENCE OF GOD

- I. Preliminary considerations.
 - A. The Bible does not begin with arguments seeking to establish or prove the existence of God, or anything about His nature.
 - B. Instead, the Word of God simply affirms His existence and begins to provide information on the nature and character of God. Gen. 1:1
 - C. Since the essence of God deals with concepts that are beyond the pale of human experience and existence, one should be keenly aware of human limitations when dealing with this subject.
 - D. At this point, the finite understanding of man seeks to comprehend and grasp the infinite nature of God.
 - E. Independent of divine revelation, mankind possesses no knowledge of divinity that qualifies him to comment on God or His essence.
 - F. Our entire understanding of God, His essence and nature, is derived from the Divine revelation of the Scripture what we may learn from the physical creation, and what we can rationally understand.
 - G. This presupposes that the Bible is the only authentic written revelation from God concerning His Person and His Plan.

- II. Definition and description.
 - A. The term essence parallels the Greek noun φύσις (phusis), meaning substance or inner nature.
 - B. This term denotes the sum of the innate properties and powers by which one person differs from another, each one having distinct characteristics.
 - C. Essence indicates being and existence, and so refers to the qualities and/or attributes of God.
 - D. God's possesses all the attributes of His essence at all times, yet not all are necessarily manifest at the same time.
 - E. The essence of God is composed of His attributes, which are ten in number, and the characteristics that are inherent in Him by virtue of those attributes.
 - F. The glory of God often refers to either His entire essence or some specific attribute of His essence. Rom. 1:23, 3:23

- III. The Divine attributes.
 - A. The Divine attributes are ten in number; they are qualities that are inherent in God, and are objectively real.
 - B. While these attributes exist at all times, no one of God's attributes functions independently, or at the expense of any other attribute.
 - C. The attribute of righteousness is the attribute by which all other attributes must check their function. God can do nothing that is in conflict with righteousness, the primary attribute that governs the other attributes of God's essence.
 - D. These attributes are divided into two groups of five--the moral attributes and the non-moral attributes.

E. The non-moral attributes include:

SOVEREIGNTY

1. God's volition is sovereign because He is not subject to review by any other being.
2. Since God possesses volition, He makes decisions, plans, policies, etc. Gen. 1:3,26
3. Due to His nature, God has no equals; He rules over everyone and everything. There is nothing outside His jurisdiction. Deut. 4:39; Ps. 93:1-2
4. As the absolute authority in the universe, He is the supreme authority as a part of His essence, which He may or may not exercise as He sees fit. Job 34:13-15
5. All other authorities, angelic and human, are delegated by God. Dan. 4:32,35; Rom. 13:1-7
6. God's sovereignty allows for human and angelic volition to adjust or maladjust to His decisions.
7. It is God's sovereign will for all men to make the salvation adjustment and the maturity adjustment. I Tim. 2:3-4
8. Three applications of Divine sovereignty include:
 - a. God's directive will--What God desires.
 - b. God's permissive will--What God allows or tolerates.
 - c. God's overruling will--God's intervention in judgment when His directive will has been rejected.

ETERNAL LIFE

1. God has no beginning and no end to His existence, which extends from eternity past into eternity future. Ps. 90:2; Isa. 43:13; Lam. 5:19; Rev. 1:8
2. God is the creator of time, and organizes the ages of time (or worlds) for His purposes. Heb. 1:2, 11:3
3. He preexisted all creation and will continue to exist after the dissolution of this creation. Gen. 1:1; IIPet. 3:10-13
4. God devised a plan whereby He could impart His life to mankind. Jn. 3:16, 4:14

OMNIPOTENCE

1. This word is derived from the Latin term "all powerful", and indicates that God is able to do all things that He desires to do.
2. Therefore, His power and authority are often closely linked. Ps. 93:1-2; Isa. 40:26-31; Jere. 27:5
3. His power and authority are limitless. I Chron. 29:11
4. Although it is true that God can do all the things He wants to do, He does not will to do all the things He can do.
5. God limits the exercise of His power to remain consistent with His essence and plan.
6. There are some things God cannot do, due to His nature:
 - a. He cannot deny Himself. IITim. 2:13
 - b. He cannot lie. Heb. 6:18
 - c. He cannot tempt anyone to sin. Jms. 1:13
 - d. He cannot be tempted with evil. Jms. 1:13

OMNIPRESENCE

1. This word is derived from the Latin "all present", indicating that God is personally present everywhere, both within and outside the material creation. Ps. 139:7-12
2. This is not to be confused with the doctrine of pantheism, which says that God is identical to the creation and denies His person.
3. God's essence penetrates and fills the universe, without diffusion, division, multiplication, etc. Jere. 23:23-24
4. God is both immanent and transcendent. Acts 17:24-28; Job 1:6-7, 2:1-2
5. He is both in Heaven and on the earth simultaneously. Isa. 66:1
6. This is a source of great comfort to the adjusted, but very disconcerting to the maladjusted. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 4:13

OMNISCIENCE

1. This term is derived from the Latin, "all knowing".
2. While this attribute is closely associated with omnipresence, God's knowledge is not restricted to "being there".
3. God's knowledge eternally preexisted all things. IPet. 1:20
4. Omniscience knows all that was, is, or can ever be. God knows that which is actual, probable, or possible. Matt. 11:21-24
5. Every detail of history is before God at all times. He knows the end as well as the beginning. Isa. 46:10
6. He does not learn, forget, remember, or acquire knowledge; He knows all things perfectly.
7. This includes all creatures, both human and angelic; He knows what they think, say or do, even before they think, say, or do it. Ps. 33:13-15, 139:1-6
8. While He possesses omniscience, His knowledge is not causative. What He foreknows and what He determines or predetermines are not that same. Rom. 8:29-30

F. The moral attributes include:

RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. God's righteousness is absolute. ISam. 2:2; Isa. 6:3; Rev. 3:7, 4:8, 6:10
2. He is absolutely free from sin in every way. IJohn 1:5, 3:5
3. He is perfect in person and character. Deut. 32:4; Ps. 11:7, Ps. 111:3
4. He is righteous in His attitudes and actions. IISam. 22:31; Rev. 19:2,11
5. God has no interest in activity or people who are less than righteous. Ps. 5:4-6
6. That which is opposed to His righteousness is called wickedness, evil, sin, or iniquity.
7. This attribute occupies the foremost position among all God's attributes, and is the watchdog of God's essence.
8. All other attributes must check their function against +R.
9. Applications to the unbeliever:
 - a. No one can attain to the standard of absolute righteousness. Rom. 3:23
 - b. Man's works are not sufficient for salvation. Isa. 64:6
 - c. The only way to obtain absolute righteousness and be accepted before God is to believe in Christ. IICor. 5:21

10. Applications to the believer:
 - a. Once you acquire +R you cannot lose it. ICor. 1:2
 - b. While we are positionally righteous in Christ, we are exhorted to live in a manner consistent with the character of God. Eph. 4:22-24
 - c. Absolute experiential righteousness is not possible for even the greatest believer in this life. IJohn 1:8,10
11. This attribute is often referred to by the term holiness, which denotes God's separation from that which is not compatible with His norms and standards. Isa. 6:3-5; Rev. 15:4

JUSTICE

1. This attribute is that aspect of God's character that demands that He deal with all creatures based on His attribute of righteousness.
2. Justice is not arbitrary, but is based strictly on the perfect standard of right that God possesses.
3. God's justice cannot be unfair or discriminating in any way. Gen. 18:25; IICron. 19:7; Ps. 19:9, 89:14
4. Due to perfect justice, God is no respecter of persons and does not show partiality. Deut. 10:17; Job 34:19; Eph. 6:9
5. Justice demands that all sins and all sinful conditions be judged at some point in the angelic conflict
6. All human sins were judged in the person of Christ; this satisfied the demands that the righteousness of God had against the human race.
7. This is theologically known as propitiation; it deals specifically with the fact that justice was satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ. Rom. 3:25; IJohn 2:2, 4:10
8. Justice acts in two ways--remuneration and retribution:
 - a. Deut. 7:9,12-13; Matt. 25:21; IPet. 1:7-9
 - b. Gen. 2:17; Ex. 34:7; Ezek. 18:4; IIThess. 1:6-8

LOVE

1. This attribute is equally present among all three members of the Godhead. IJn. 4:8
2. This attribute is eternal and unchanging. Micah 7:18-20
3. Although man has not always loved God, He has always loved mankind. Jn. 3:16; IJn. 4:10
4. This attribute does not spring from an emotional source, but acts in accord with righteousness and the best interest of the objects of love.
5. God's love is not emotional, sloppy or maudlin, but is the expression of His care and concern for the best interests of those with whom He deals.
6. Unlike man's love, which is often directed toward that he finds attractive, desirable, or amenable to his person, God's love is equally directed toward His enemies. Rom. 5:8,10
7. God's love motivated Him to offer His own Son in the place of His enemies. Jn. 3:16; IICor. 5:21
8. Once one becomes a son of God by virtue of faith in Christ and the new birth, he cannot be separated from the love of God. Rom. 8:35-39

9. Both overt blessing and Divine discipline are expressions of the love of God. Matt. 6:4,6; Heb. 12:5-13
10. Variations in blessing among believers are not due to a lack of love on God's part; they are due to variations in the assigned niche, in positive and negative volition, variations in obedience, and variations in spiritual growth.

IMMUTABILITY

1. This attribute deals with the fact that God cannot change in His essence. Ps. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6
2. God cannot become better or worse than what He already is.
3. This attribute is absolute and is the glue that binds all of the other attributes together.
4. God's faithfulness stems from His immutability. Num. 23:19-20, Lam. 3:22-23; Mal. 3:6
5. God is faithful to:
 - a. Save and keep saved. Jn. 3:16; IITim. 2:13
 - b. Forgive. IJn. 1:9
 - c. Protect us in temptation. ICor. 10:13
 - d. Complete His plan for the believer. ICor. 1:8-9; IThess. 5:23-24
6. God's word, which comes from His essence, is immutable and faithful. Ps. 119:86,89; Isa. 40:8

VERACITY

1. This attribute deals with the fact that God is the only source of truth. Ps. 31:5, 117:2
2. This attribute means that it is impossible for God to lie, or ever do anything in contradiction to the truth. Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18
3. He does not acquire truth; He is truth and manifests this in His:
 - a. Ways. Ps. 25:10, 86:15; Rev. 15:3
 - b. Works. Ps. 111:7-8; Dan. 4:37
4. As a corollary, He expects His creation to deal in the realm of truth, just as He does. Ps. 51:6; Jere. 5:1-3
5. Since His Word proceeds from His essence, it is absolutely trustworthy and reliable. IISam. 7:28; Ps. 119:151
6. The Word of truth is the basis for our salvation.
 - a. Ph1 salvation. Col. 1:5; James 1:18
 - b. Ph2 salvation (sanctification) Jn. 17:17; IIThess. 2:13
 - c. Ph3 salvation (SG3) Col. 1:5; IIThess. 2:14

- IV. The nature of God.
 - A. Beyond the attributes that God possesses, the Word of God also establishes certain truths about the nature of God.
 - B. He possesses certain characteristics that further help us to define and understand Him.
 - C. These characteristics include:
 1. Personality.
 - a. God is a person, He possesses the attributes and manifests all that one would expect of a person.
 - b. He has self-consciousness. Isa. 45:5-6

- c. He has self-determination. Job 23:13; Rom. 9:11; Eph. 1:11, 3:11. He executes His decisions. Dan. 4:24,33
 - d. He is alive. Josh. 3:10; Matt. 16:16
 - e. He uses the normal pronouns when referring to Himself, including I, Me, Mine, etc.
 - f. He is discriminating and discerning. Gen. 1:4,7
 - g. He chooses those with whom He will associate and those with whom He fellowships. Jn. 14:21-23
2. Spirituality.
- a. God is immaterial, invisible, and yet real. Jn. 4:24; Rom.1:20; ITim. 1:17
 - b. Man is not capable of seeing God in His absolute essence and remaining alive. Ex. 33:20
 - c. No one has ever seen the divine essence. Jn. 1:18
 - d. Only in Ph3 will the believer be able to see God. Rev. 22:4
 - e. This is why the Jews--and everyone else for that matter--were told not to make images. Deut. 4:15-19
3. Infinity.
- a. God created both space and time for His purposes. Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16
 - b. God is without boundary or limitation of any kind.
 - c. God's infinity in relationship to space is called immensity.
 - d. God is not confined by space, but all finite space depends on Him.
 - e. This is also known as transcendence.
 - f. God's infinity in regard to time is called eternity.
 - g. He is free from the succession of time, and functions outside of the constraints of time.
 - h. Since God has no beginning or end, He is called the eternal God. Gen. 21:33

V. The names of God.

- A. The names of God, which are found in the Old Testament, are often designed to communicate some attribute or characteristic of God.
- B. This is one way God revealed Himself before the completed canon.
- C. The first major names for God were אֵל ('el), which means strong or mighty, and אֱלֹהִים ('elohiym), the plural, indicating a plurality in the Godhead.
- D. The second primary term by which He revealed Himself is יְהוָה (y^ehowah) which is derived from the the verb הָיָה (hayah—to become), and points to His existence or being.
- E. These names are joined in compound with other words to teach some aspect of the divine essence, including:
 1. אֵל עֵלְיוֹן ('el `el yon), **the most high God**--sovereignty
 2. אֵל עוֹלָם ('el `olam), **the God of eternity**--eternal life
 3. אֵל שָׁדַי ('el shaday), **the God of breasts**—omnipotence
 4. אֵל רֹאֵי ('el ra 'iy), **the God who sees**--omniscience
 5. אֵל אֱמוּנָה ('el emunah), **the God who is faithful or reliable**—immutability
 6. אֵל גְּמוּלוֹת ('el g^emuloth), **the God of paybacks**—justice
 7. יְהוָה צְדָקָנוּ (yhwh tsed qenu), **the Lord our righteousness**—righteousness

F. While these are not all of the compound names used to teach some aspect or quality of the nature of God, they are certainly typical.

VI. Figures of speech and the essence of God.

A. Since God is a spirit, which means that He is immaterial, invisible, eternal, and infinite, the Bible employs some figures of speech in order to describe God in terms that are easier for humans to understand. Jn. 1:18; Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17, 6:16

B. All figures of speech are simply language of accommodation used to communicate some truth with respect to God's attributes.

C. The first figure of speech most commonly used concerning the essence of God is an anthropomorphism, which is applying to God some human bodily part that God does not possess.

D. Some of the most common anthropomorphisms (and what they portray) include:

1. Hand—Omnipotence. ISam. 5:11; Job 19:21
2. Arm—Omnipotence. Ps 89:21; Isa. 51:5
3. Eyes—Omniscience-Omnipresence. Gen. 6:5,8; IIChron. 16:9
4. Face—Righteousness. Isa. 54:8, 65:3
5. Breasts—Omnipotence. Gen. 17:1, 28:3
6. Finger—Omnipotence. Ex. 8:19; Lk. 11:20
7. Mouth—Veracity. Deut. 8:3; Jer. 23:16
8. Heart—Love. Jer. 31:20, 48:36
9. Nose—Satisfaction of Righteousness/propitiation. Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18

E. The second figure of speech commonly used to communicate some aspect of God or His plan is an anthropathism, which involves ascribing to God some human emotion, passion, or weakness, which He does not possess.

F. The most common among these include:

1. Hate, anger—Righteousness. Prov. 6:16; Num. 22:22
2. Jealousy—Righteousness. Ex. 20:5; Josh. 24:19
3. Repent or change the mind—Righteousness/Justice. Gen. 6:6; Jer. 26:3
4. Upset, grieved—Righteousness. Gen. 6:6; Ps. 78:40
5. Searching—Omniscience. IChron. 28:9; ICor. 2:10
6. Remembering—Omniscience/Divine timing. Gen. 8:1, 19:29
7. Coming or going—Omnipresence. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20
8. Not repent—Immutability. Num. 23:19

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

A. The term **trinity** is not found in the Word of God; nevertheless, it is a term that effectively communicates the revealed truth that the eternal God exists in three persons.

B. The Bible reveals that God is one in His essence, but exists as three distinct persons sharing that identical essence.

C. This doctrine, like many doctrines, is revealed in fragmentary units, which is the nature of progressive revelation.

D. This method enables God to hide the truth from negative volition and reveal it to positive volition via the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

E. The unity of the Godhead.

1. God is one in essence, undivided and indivisible; it is clearly taught in the Old Testament that there is one true God, as opposed to a plurality of gods. Deut. 4:35,39, 6:4; IKings 8:60; Isa. 45:5-6
 2. This teaches a strict monotheism as opposed to other views of God such as pantheism or polytheism.
 3. The same truth is taught in the New Testament. Mk. 12:29-32; Jn. 17:3; ICor. 8:4-6; ITim. 2:5
- F. The trinity.
1. The concept of the trinity is based solely on the Divine revelation, which is recorded in the Word of God..
 2. By the term **trinity** we mean that God exists as three distinct personalities, each of whom shares the same Divine essence.
 3. Judaism, Islam, Unitarians, and Jehovah's Witnesses are some religious groups that reject this truth.
 4. This was taught in the Old Testament as seen in the fact that:
 - a. YHWH is distinguished from YHWH. Gen. 19:24; Hos. 1:7
 - b. YHWH has a son. Ps. 2:7
 - c. The Holy Spirit is distinguished from God. Gen. 1:2, 6:3; Ps. 51:11
 - d. Plural pronouns are used of God. Gen. 1:26-27, 11:7
 - e. Three distinct persons are in view in Isaiah 48:16 and 61:1.
 5. Beyond this, the revelation of the **angel of the Lord** teaches a plurality (at the minimum a duality) within the Godhead.
 - a. The **angel of YHWH** is YHWH. Gen. 16:7-13, 22:15-19; Ex. 3:1-4
 - b. The **angel of YHWH** is distinguished from YHWH. Gen. 24:7; Ex. 23:20; Num. 22:31; Zech. 1:12
 6. This same truth is taught in the New Testament in a number of places. Matt. 28:19; II-Cor. 13:14; IPet. 1:2
 7. The attributes and actions of deity are ascribed to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 8. Without seeking to oversimplify matters, the Father is often seen to be the planner (Gen. 1:26), the Son is seen as the executor (Gen. 2:4), and the Holy Spirit as the revealer of the plan. Lk. 2:26; ICor. 2:10
 9. These personality distinctions are eternal and are not in conflict with the unity of God.

VIII. Categories of false or antitheistic theories.

- A. Many have advocated systems of belief that are in contradiction to the truth of strict trinitarian monotheism.
- B. All of these systems are satanic viewpoint, human viewpoint that proceeds from the sin nature, or a combination of the two.
- C. They are designed to delude man, destroy him, and rob God of the glory due to Him.
- D. Atheism.
 1. This system advocates the outright lie that there is no God.
 2. One logical corollary of this system is evolution, since one has to explain physical existence.
 3. Those who espouse this theory often move into nihilism, which is the doctrine that nothing exists and there is no truth.

4. Others move into hedonism, which is the teaching that pleasure is the sole purpose for existence.
 5. Atheism leads to anarchy in morals and ethics.
- E. Agnosticism
1. This is the theory that suggests that one cannot know anything with absolute certainty about God's existence or His person ; this is based on the belief that the metaphysical is beyond the limits of reason.
 2. This theory denies the inspiration of the Divine revelation found in the Bible, and refuses to address evidence that is available.
 3. This results in a lack of objective standards concerning what is right or wrong; again, anarchy is one of the logical results.
- F. Polytheism
1. This theory advocates the belief that there exists a plurality of gods.
 2. Polytheism distributes the perfections and functions of the eternal God among a plurality of limited gods.
 3. This system must result in confusion and a complete lack of objective confidence, since one could never really know if they had a relationship with the correct god.
 4. Nor could they ever be secure in the belief that their god could not somehow be beaten or overpowered by another god.
- G. Pantheism
1. This is the belief that God and the universe are one.
 2. It denies the transcendence of God, as well as denying His personality.
 3. This false, theological system claims that God is simply the sum total of all that exists.
 4. The Hindu religion is predicated upon this belief.
- H. Deism
1. This belief system admits that God is personal, infinite, and holy.
 2. It advocates the idea that God created the universe, as a self-sustaining entity, governed by certain natural forces that would cause it to remain self-sustaining and self-perpetuating.
 3. He then abandoned the universe to its fate, determined to remain transcendent, and has not revealed Himself in any way.
 4. Although God has not provided mankind any revelation with respect to His person and will, He will finally judge all men in the end.
 5. This system denies God's immanence, and casts doubt on His righteousness and love.
- I. Materialism
1. This is a form of atheism that denies the existence of God, and states that all things may be explained by material means.
 2. This theory advocates the notion that matter is eternal, and life is only a product of matter.
 3. One belief that arises from this system is that material well-being should rule in matters of conduct.
 4. Some results that have arisen from this materialistic view are communism and monetary reversionism.

J. Idealism

1. This theory contends that the mind or reason is the only entity of consequence.
2. The material world is no more than an impression or illusion that is created by the mind.
3. Some that embrace this theory believe that there is a God, but that He did not create material things.
4. This leads to the notion that matter is evil, since it is not mind.
5. The earliest forms of Gnosticism and modern Christian scientists have subscribed to this viewpoint.

K. Evolution

1. Under this satanic doctrine, two viewpoints may be observed.
2. The first is atheistic evolution, which states that there is no God, and all that exists simply evolved over time.
3. Several problems exist with this theory:
 - a. The law of cause and effect demands an original cause.
 - b. The first law of thermodynamics teaches that neither matter nor energy can be created; this harmonizes with the completed creation as clearly taught in the Word of God. Gen. 2:1-2; Heb. 4:3.
 - c. The second law of thermodynamics, or entropy increase, completely contradicts the idea that a closed system can become more complex.
 - d. If one takes the Bible seriously, the massive amounts of time required for this theory never existed.
 - 1.) There is plenty of biblical evidence that mankind has not resided on planet earth for more than about 6000 years.
 - 2.) While the Genesis record is silent with respect to the timing of original creation, there is significant evidence that our universe is not nearly as ancient as posited by those promoting evolution.
 - 3.) All carbon dating theories are flawed since they are based on the necessity of a closed system that operates under uniform conditions.
 - 4.) These dating systems reject the Divine revelation with respect to catastrophes, and tend to reject the belief that the earth was created with an illusion of age. IIPet. 3:4-6; Gen. 1:2, 7:18-24
4. The second theory is theistic evolution, which suggests that God created the original materials from which the universe evolved, teaching that evolution is the method by which all development occurred.
5. Problems include:
 - a. A lack of understanding with respect to the nature of the essence of God, He never created anything that was less than perfect. Gen. 1:2; Isa. 45:18; Ezek. 28:12-15
 - b. Complete lack of scriptural documentation and scientific proof.
 - c. The scripture refutes any suggestion of upward evolution on the fifth day of restoration. Gen. 1:20-23
 - d. Add to this all of the problems that are germane to atheistic evolution.