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No Ordinary God—Filling Out the Picture

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The Christian doctrine of God is rooted in this most fundamental truth—that God and God alone is sovereign. The Bible reveals the true and living God in this way, and without this revealed knowledge we would know nothing of Him, for He is incomprehensible and beyond the reach of our creaturely investigation. There is much we cannot know of God, for as the Apostle Paul asked, “How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways.” [Romans 11:33] There are questions about God we simply should not ask. Martin Luther, the great reformer, reminded his own students of this truth with a memorable story recorded in his Table Talk. “When one [student] asked, where was God before heaven was created? St. Augustine answered: He was in himself. When another asked me the same question, I said: He was building hell for such idle, presumptuous, fluttering and inquisitive spirits as you.” I can assure you that every seminary professor has been tempted at some point to answer a troublesome student the same way!

This God is one, and He is the only God. That most basic truth is found in the Shema—that central verse to the Old Testament [Deuteronomy 6:4]: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” This great revelation set the true worship of Israel over against the myriad paganisms all around them. That great central truth is followed by the Great Commandment: “You shall love the LORD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” [Deuteronomy 6:5]

This God who is one is also three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not an accessory doctrine to Christianity—it is our most central doctrine. This great doctrine sets the worship and witness of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ over against all the constellation of rampant heresies in our own day. The doctrine of the Trinity is the most fundamental starting-point in which everything else we know of God is rooted. As the early church confessed, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, each “very God of very God,” fully divine—of one essence—one true God.

The God revealed in the Bible is a personal God, not an impersonal force. He is Spirit, but He is not merely a vague Spirit who animates the universe. He is both Spirit and person. The God of the Bible relates to His creatures, and that relationship is genuine and personal.

God is self-existent and self-sufficient. He depends upon nothing, and is complete in Himself. God is the only uncreated being, and He brought all creatures into being. He is eternal—there never was a time when He was not; there never will be a time when He is not; and He himself is the Creator of time. When Moses asked His name, God responded: “I AM WHO I AM.” [Exodus 3:14] His name establishes His eternity and self-existence.

This is a good reminder to us that God does not need His creatures, but He chooses to glorify Himself through them. Our God is a God of glory. The Bible is rich with passages about the glory of God—the radiance of His deity and the

effulgence of His majesty. There is no one like Him, and no one to whom He can be compared. The more we know Him, the more we see His glory, and the more greatly we glorify Him.

God never changes. As the great hymn resounds, “there is no shadow of turning” in Him—He is not forced to change His will or His ways. This is a great comfort to His people. Our God is not quick to anger, and He keeps His promises. As the Lord stated in Malachi 3:6, “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Human language fails to express the greatness and majesty of God, but we must do our best with the words at our disposal. Several key words describe important attributes of God, truths about Him we must know and confess.

God knows all things—past, present, and future. There is nothing hidden from His sight. God never learns anything, for He has no need of learning. We describe this as His omniscience. God’s knowledge is all-encompassing and perfect. As A. W. Tozer has written: “God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.”

God’s infinite and comprehensive knowledge is also a foreknowledge. God does not wait to see what will happen. He rules by the power of His will and by the determination of His foreknowledge. As King Nebuchadnezzar boldly stated: “He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and no one can ward off His hand....” This should come as great comfort to God’s people, for we are safe in the care of the One who knows the future and rules the future, as well as the past and present. God knows all the people of the earth, and He knows us better than we know ourselves. As David expressed this, “O LORD You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You scrutinize my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all.” [Psalm 139:1-4]

The all here is categorical. There is nothing God does not know, even the thoughts yet unformed in our minds. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

The Christian worldview is structured, first of all, by the revealed knowledge of God. And this means the comprehensive knowledge of the self-revealing God who defines Himself and will accept no rivals. There is no other starting point for an authentic Christian worldview—and there is no substitute.

