

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

Class 1 – Introduction: What is “Systematic Theology”?

2024–2025

Daniel Baker

Cornerstone Fellowship Church

I. Hello!

II. John 3:16 Pop-Quiz – Unavoidable Theology

III. What is “Systematic Theology”?

More precisely and from a Christian viewpoint, dogmatics is the knowledge that God has revealed in his Word to the church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him.

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*¹

God’s thoughts cannot be opposed to one another and thus necessarily form an organic unity....The imperative task of the dogmatician is to THINK GOD’S THOUGHTS AFTER HIM and to trace their unity.

Bavinck²

A definition: Systematic theology is the study of what the whole Bible teaches organized by a logical order of topics.

- What the whole Bible teaches
- Logical order of topics
- What the whole Bible teaches about each topic

IV. What are some other approaches?

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:38.

² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:44.

- A. **Biblical Theology**
- B. **Historical Theology**
- C. **But our foundation is always a rigorous study of God's Word.**

V. How is the class organized?

- A. **Syllabus**
- B. **The Reading: Systematic Theology, The Trinity Catechism, The Trinity Confession of Faith**
- C. **The Trinity Catechism**
- D. **The Writing**
 - 1. What are some things we need to understand and believe about _____?
 - 2. 400 words (Full-credit), 250 words (half-credit)

VI. The Apostles Creed (p 14)

VII. Next Time...

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Class 2 – Revelation

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I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz

- How was the reading?
- Questions about writing assignments?

II. The Difficulty of “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. (Isa 55:8)

For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Cor 2:11)

God must make the first move...like a parent to a baby...

He reveals himself and his “thoughts” to us in a way we can understand. That is what “**revelation**” is.

See this throughout the Bible:

- God to Adam
- God to Abraham
- God to Moses
- Christ to us

III. General Revelation

Theologians divide God’s revelation in different ways, but one of the most helpful is “**general**” and “**special revelation**.”

General revelation: God's revelation to all people through the creation and the conscience. It speaks of him as Creator and invites all people to commune with him.

Special revelation: God's direct revelation, especially through the Bible. It speaks of him as Redeemer and invites all people to be saved through faith.

The barrier to understanding: sin.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:18–21)

For us to fully grasp God's general or special revelation, *we need him to save us.*

IV. **General Revelation: The Creation and the Conscience**

The creation as God's painting, God the Master Architect

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (Ps 19:1)

14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Rom 2:14–15)

V. **Special Revelation**

Direct revelation through:

- Direct speech (Gen 2:17)

- Miracles: As in Exodus 3, dreams (Gen 20:3–6; Matt 1:20–21), miracles of Christ (Matt 14:25–27; John 11:4–44; Acts 3:1–10; 6:8; 19:11–12), the “signs and wonders” of God’s people (
- Christ himself – He is “the Word” (John 1:1–3)

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Heb 1:1–2)

- But especially his special revelation is captured in the Bible:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

VI. Attributes of the Bible

A. **Inspiration** (2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 3:7) – It is “breathed out by God”

B. **Authority** – The Bible speaks to us with the very authority of God himself

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet 1:14-16)

C. **Inerrancy** – It contains no errors

“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Num 23:19)

D. **Necessity** – It is *necessary* for a person to be saved and live a godly life before God.

Without God’s Word, we do not know what we need to know.

E. **Sufficiency** – It is enough to have only the Bible.

Other things are helpful (psychology, philosophy), but it is sufficient to have only the Bible. Remember 2 Tim 3:17: with the Bible we are “equipped for every good work.”

F. Clarity – The Bible is clear enough that we can grasp what is needed to be saved and obey God.

But not everything is equally clear! That's why Paul told Timothy, "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything" (2 Tim 2:7).

VII. What should we do?

Given the unique treasure that the Bible is, how should we respond? Read it, love it, delight in it, meditate on it, memorize it, preach it, hear it, listen to it taught, obey it, revere it, believe it. Amen.

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Class 3 – The Knowability and Names of God

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I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz

II. Why Work Hard to Know God?

What does it mean to *know* someone?

The uniqueness of knowing God: Knowing God is *like* knowing anyone, but it's also *unlike* knowing anyone or anything else.

As Tozer rightly said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”³

The benefits:

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:7-8)

³ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), 1.

III. God the Unknowable One

“The finite cannot comprehend the infinite.”

Herman Bavinck⁴

“There is no knowledge of God as he is in himself.”⁵

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. (John 1:18)

God bridges the gap between his infinite being and our very finite understanding.

John Calvin said God speaking to us is like a parent speaking baby talk to their newborn. He lowers himself to speak to us in a way we’ll understand.

IV. God the Knowable One

“Innate” and “Acquired” Knowledge of God.

All know:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:18-21)

And yet we must work to know him. That’s the “acquired” aspect.

V. Names of God

⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:40.

⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:47.

God reveals himself through the names he uses. These names are not invented by people but are a revelation from God.

A. “God” (Heb., *El, Elohim*)

In the beginning, **God** created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1)

B. “LORD” (Heb., *Yahweh*) – His “proper name”

God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM.**” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exod 3:14)

C. “My Master” (Heb., *Adonai*)

The LORD says to **my Lord**: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” (Ps 110:1)

D. “Lord” (Grk. *kurios*)

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 1:20)

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both **Lord** and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36)

VI. The Incommunicable Attributes of God

A way of thinking about God’s attributes: incommunicable and communicable.

“Incommunicable” means attributes that are not *communicated* or shared with people.

“Communicable” means attributes that are *communicated* or shared with people.

We start with his “Incommunicable Attributes”:

A. The Simplicity of God

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deut 6:4)

In theology, simplicity does not mean God is elementary or basic. It means God is not made up of, composed of, or compounded by parts. For example, God does not merely possess attributes, as if his attributes are different parts of his essence, each part compatible with every other part. That is not simplicity but merely congruence. Rather,

simplicity means that God's essence just *is* his attributes, and his attributes his essence. Scripture, for instance, does not merely say God possesses love, but that he *is* love. God does not merely perform good acts, but he *is* good. In other words, God's attributes are not one thing and his essence another thing, but all that is in God *is* God. Incorporeal and immutable, God is identical with his perfections. That is what it means for God to be one.

Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity*⁶

B. Self-Existence/Independence

He depends on nothing for his existence, and all things are dependent on him for their existence.

“Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:25)

C. Immutable

It is not simply that he does not change, which is true! It is that he is not able to be changed.

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” (Mal 3:6)

D. Eternal

“The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” (Deut 33:27)

It is not just really old and everlasting, which is true! It is that he has a different relationship to time than we have. All things are present-tense to him. There is no real “before” and “after” with him, no sense of long or short periods of time. That's why we read in 2 Peter,

“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Peter 3:8)

E. Omnipresent

⁶ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2021), 54.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (Ps 139:7-8)

VII. Our Response: Worship!

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God. (Isa 45:5)

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable. (Ps 145:3)

VIII. Next Time: The Communicable Attributes of God

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

Class 4 – The Communicable Attributes of God

2024–2025

Daniel Baker

Cornerstone Fellowship Church

I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Question 8)

II. A Review: Communicable and Incommunicable Attributes

A way of thinking about God’s attributes is by dividing them into “incommunicable” and “communicable” attributes.

“Incommunicable” means attributes that are not *communicated* or shared with people. We covered this last time.

“Communicable” means attributes that are *communicated* or shared with people. That’s what we’ll cover today.

III. The Spirituality of God

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)

As spirit, he has no body or form. In the marvelous words of the Westminster Divines,

“There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory” (*WCF* 2.1).

Communicable: We can “worship him...in spirit,” because there is a non-physical side to us. And this spirit/soul is brought to life in Christ (Eph 2:5) and united with Christ (Rom 6:3–4).

IV. Intellectual Attributes

A. The Knowledge of God

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? (Isa 40:12)

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing. (Isa 40:26)

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? (Isa 40:27)

Communicable: For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge (2 Pet 1:5); And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

B. The Wisdom of God

God's "wisdom" is his perfection in knowing and choosing the best means to accomplish his purposes in a way that brings him the most glory:

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!....For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:33, 36).

It is his wisdom that is behind all his works:

"O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24).

Communicable: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Prov 9:10)

C. The Truthfulness of God

God's "truthfulness" is both the perfection of his being fully true without any trace of falsehood or deceit and also his being true in the sense of perfectly faithful.

Being opposed to any falsehood or deceit, we know

"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num 23:19).

Communicable: Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Eph 4:25)

V. Moral Attributes

A. The Goodness of God

God's "goodness" is his perfection of being benevolent toward all things and especially his people. It is one of the dominant themes in our Bibles, seen within the first page as "God saw" that each act of his creation "was good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and the whole of it "was very good" (Gen 1:31). In the Psalms he is praised, because "You are good and do good" (Ps 119:68), and "The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made" (Ps 145:9).

Communicable: So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10)

B. The Love of God

Herman Bavinck: "The goodness of God appears as love when it not only conveys certain benefits but God himself."⁷

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4:16)

This love first existed within the Trinity itself, for "the Father loves the Son" (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17); and the Son loves the Father (John 14:31). For this reason, the Father seeks the glory of the Son (Phil 2:9–11), and the Son seeks the glory of the Father (John 17:1), and the Spirit seeks the glory of the Son (John 16:14). There was an endless giving and receiving of love between the Father, Son, and Spirit for untold ages before the first angel or person inhabited the creation.

But this love was extended to us as well even in eternity past:

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Eph 1:4-5)

And redeemed us:

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8)

⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:215.

Communicable: 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:1-2)

C. The Holiness of God

And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa 6:3)

Holy means “separateness,” set apart from all that is unholy and set apart *for God*.

Sinclair Ferguson brings out this means a radical *devotion* to God—a devotion first within God himself but also to be expressed in us.

Communicable: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet 1:16)

VI. Attributes of Sovereignty

The Will of God

The will of God means what God determines and desires, what he chooses within himself.

Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. (Ps 135:6)

Here we can divide it into his DECRETIVE WILL and his PRECEPTIVE WILL (or his HIDDEN WILL and his REVEALED WILL).

Communicable: We are to do his will (Matt 7:21), but of course we are under his HIDDEN/DECRETIVE WILL also and cannot help but be and do according to this will.

VII. Attributes of Perfection

All the attributes of God discussed...are summed up in his perfection....In speaking of God’s perfection here, we are not referring exclusively to his moral perfection (i.e., his goodness or holiness), but mean that God is the sum total of all his perfections, the One than whom no greater, higher, or better can exist either in thought or reality. In other words, God fully answers to the idea of God.

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*⁸

“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deut 32:4)

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

Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah (Ps 24:10)

Communicable: You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:48)

VIII. And so we worship him...and trust him!

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; (1 Chr 16:29)

29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. 30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isa 40:29-31)

⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:250.

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

Class 5 – God as Trinity

2024–2025

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I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Question 9–10)

II. The Trinity Develops Throughout the Bible

A. Our God is One God

1. Deut 6:4
2. Isa 44:6
3. 1 Tim 2:5

B. Our One God is Plural in Nature

1. *Elohim* in Genesis 1:1
2. “The Spirit of God” hovering on the waters (Gen 1:2)
3. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26)

C. Our One God is Three Distinct Persons

1. The Baptism of Jesus – Matt 3:13–17
2. The Great Commission – Matt 28:18–20
3. The Consistency of the Language Attached to the Three Persons
 - a) Father (Matt 6:16; 6:9; 11:25–27)
 - b) Son (Ps 2:7; Matt 3:17; John 20:17)
 - c) Spirit (Gen 1:2; Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18-19; Acts 5:3–4)

D. The Three Persons Have a Distinct Relationship to One Another

1. At Creation: Gen 1:1–3; John 1:1–3
2. In Redemption: Eph 1:3–14
3. John’s Gospel
 - a) John 1:1–3
 - b) John 1:18 where Jesus is the “only begotten” of the Father

- c) John 14:10–11, 18: Mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Spirit, but also the Godhead “dwelling” in us
- d) John 16:14; 17:1, 4: The Son glorifies the Father, the Father glorifies the Son, the Spirit glorifies the Son
- e) John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:31: The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father
- f) John 5:36; 20:21: Son is sent by the Father; John 15:26; 16:7: Spirit sent by the Father and the Son. Note 15:26 that Spirit is the one who “proceeds” from the Father. Present tense.

III. **Class Challenge: Groups of 3, come up with an analogy of “one-in-three” and “three-in-one.”**

IV. **The Trinity Develops Throughout Church History**

- A. **The Apostles Creed – Likely dating to the 2nd century, the earliest record of it in a letter from Ambrose of Milan to Rome in AD 389.⁹ Note the simple statements about “God the Father Almighty,” “Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord,” “the Holy Spirit.”**

I believe in ***God the Father Almighty***; Maker of heaven and earth. And in ***Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord***; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in ***the Holy Spirit***; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.
Amen.

- B. **The Nicene Creed (AD 325) – Note the significant development of the “Lord Jesus Christ” paragraph in response to the Arian controversy.¹⁰**

⁹ Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*, 89.

¹⁰ For the Nicene Creed and Creed of the Council of Constantinople, see Phillip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds1/creeds1.iv.iii.html>.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, ***the Son of God, begotten of the Father the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;***

By whom all things were made both in heaven by whom all things were made;
and on earth;

Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.

In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.

C. The Council of Constantinople (AD 381) – *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*, often referred to as simply “The Nicene Creed” – With this change, the “Lord Jesus Christ” paragraph is developed further

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, ***the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;*** by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in ***the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father,*** who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

D. Augustine (354–430) – He especially helped the church see that with any one member of the Trinity you have the whole God because each

is fully God. He also shifted the emphasis from the Father being the source of the deity of the Son and Spirit (emphasized in the East) to the whole Trinity being the source of the deity of each person of the Trinity. The full deity of the Son was therefore protected.

E. The Athanasian Creed (AD 500s)

Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith:

Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;

Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Spirit.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is: such is the Son: and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father uncreated: the Son uncreated: and the Holy Spirit uncreated.

The Father incomprehensible: the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal: the Son eternal: and the Holy Spirit eternal.

And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal.

And also there are not three uncreated: nor three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated: and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is Almighty: the Son Almighty: and the Holy Spirit Almighty.

And yet they are not three Almightyies: but one Almighty.

So the Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Spirit is God.

And yet they are not three Gods: but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord: the Son Lord: and the Holy Spirit Lord.

And yet not three Lords: but one Lord:

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord:

So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion: to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten: but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three Sons: one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another: none is greater, or less than another.

But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal.

So that in all things, as aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man.

God, of the Substance of the Father; begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of His Mother, born into the world.

Perfect God: and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood.

Who although He be God and Man; yet He is not two, but one Christ.

One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the Manhood into God.

One altogether; not by confusion of Substance: but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hell: rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, He sitteth on the right hand of the Father God Almighty.

From whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;

And shall give account for their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting: and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he can not be saved.

F. The Council of Toledo (AD 589) – adds the *filioque* clause (“and the Son”) – the final development of the original Nicene Creed

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in ***one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father***; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in ***the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son***; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And one holy catholic and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

V. The Trinity: 6 Summary Statements

A. There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence (ousia, essentia).¹¹

1. Not just one kind of being in God, God is one being.
Not like having the same kind of vanilla ice cream in all the Breyer's containers at Food Lion, but three containers of ice cream but inside is the exact same ice cream—to take a bite out of one container is to take a bite out of all three containers?!?!?!?

 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deut 6:4)
2. Key terms used to describe the one “essence” of the Godhead:
 - a) “Essence,” “what something is” fr. Latin *essentia*.¹² Connects to the Latin *esse* (“to be, exist”). Accents more the ongoing existence of God, God as fullness of “being.”
 - b) “Substance,” “the ‘stuff’ of which someone or something consists.”¹³ Connects to *substantia* (“nature, substance”). Accents more what he is, what is it that God is that nothing else is.
 - c) “Ousia,” “Being (that which is),”¹⁴ from the Greek, related to the feminine participle of the verb “to be” (*eimi*). In ancient Greek (Plato) it spoke to “the being, essence, nature” of a thing.¹⁵ This word was captured in the Nicene Creed through its use of *homoousios*, “same essence,” to speak of the Son of God. He is not of a “similar essence” (*homoiousios*), which the East preferred, but has the “same essence” (*homōousios*) as the Father.
3. This is deeply mysterious. Each is not 1/3 of God, and there are not 3 gods. Each is fully the one being of God. The “pervasive

¹¹ Berkhof, *ST*, 87.

¹² Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R, 2004), 499.

¹³ Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 502.

¹⁴ Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 501.

¹⁵ Liddell & Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (1889).

monotheism” of the Bible is why we say this: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1); “There is one God” (1 Tim 2:5). Each person of the Trinity is fully, eternally, God, occupying the same ‘space’ since each is omnipresent, possessing the same knowledge since each is omniscient, possessing the same power since each is omnipotent, possessing the same glory, the same infinitude, the same status. Our God is one Being and not three beings, one ‘Thing’ and not three things.

B. In this one Divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹⁶

From passages like the ones above, we know this to be true. The persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth....No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. (John 1:14, 18)

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen 1:2)

It’s important to say here that we did not name God. We didn’t give him the name “Father” or “Son” or “Holy Spirit.” These are names he revealed about himself.

The Father *has always been* the Father. The Son *has always been* the Son. The Holy Spirit *has always been* the Holy Spirit. These were true before Creation, before the Son came as a man and as the Son of Man (or Son of Mary). They are eternally and permanently true.

These names for the persons of God have meaning: God the Father is the consummate Father—to the Son and the Spirit and to all creation in a unique and unchanging manner.

The Son is the Son of the Father, eternally so. The Word which creates, saves, judges, a “word” being that which comes from the being of another.

¹⁶ Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 501.

There was no moment when this happened since the Son is eternal. He has always related to God the Father in this way.

The Holy Spirit—“Spirit” is the same word as breath, wind—is the “breath” of the Father and the Son. The life, breath, and power of God that springs eternally from the Father and the Son.

Each lives for the glory and joy of the others. The Father seeks to glorify the Son. The Son seeks to glorify the Father. The Spirit seeks to glorify the Father and the Son.

1. “Person” (fr. Latin *persona*). Different than how we speak of “people.” Has to do with an individual, rational being. Multiple persons at a human level must always be separate from one another. Not so in the Godhead, which is indivisible.
2. *Hypostasis*, a Greek word that came to mean “something with a concrete existence.”¹⁷ Its meaning varied in the early centuries of the church.
3. *Subsistence* (fr. Latin *subsistentia*, “that which exists in itself and not in another”¹⁸).

Berkhof notes that “the variety of terms used points to the fact that their inadequacy was always felt.”¹⁹

“Person,” therefore, I call a “subsistence” in God’s essence.
John Calvin²⁰

As one God, the three Persons are distinguished not by essential properties (characteristics related to essence) but by their personal properties (sometimes called ‘incommunicable properties’).
Kevin DeYoung²¹

¹⁷ Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 499.

¹⁸ Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 231.

¹⁹ Berkhof, *ST*, 95.

²⁰ *Institutes*, I:xiii:6.

²¹ DeYoung, “Distinguishing Among the Three Persons of the Trinity within the Reformed Tradition” (Sep 27, 2016), available at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/distinguishing-among-the-three-persons-of-the-trinity-within-the-reformed-tradition/>.

C. “The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.”²²

Anywhere you point to “God,” you point to the Father and also to the Son and also the Spirit. And each is fully and infinitely and eternally God. No one of them is more God than the other two.

D. “The subsistence (personhood) and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.”²³

In terms of the persons (subsistences) of God the Father is first, the Son second, the Spirit third. But they are co-equal in glory and attributes and God-ness.

E. “There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished.”²⁴

Berkhof summarizes the teaching of the church about the persons of the Godhead:

“Generation is an act of the Father only; filiation belongs to the Son exclusively; and procession can only be ascribed to the Holy Spirit.”²⁵

“Though they are all works of the three persons jointly, creation is ascribed primarily to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit. This order in the divine operations points back to the essential order in God and forms the basis for what is generally known as the economic Trinity.”²⁶

The “economic Trinity” has to do with the way each person in the Trinity is highlighted by different aspects of the work of Creation and Redemption.

Creation and Redemption are generally seen as...

From the Father...
Through the Son...
By the Spirit.

²² Berkhof, *ST*, 88.

²³ Berkhof, *ST*, 88.

²⁴ Berkhof, *ST*, 89.

²⁵ Berkhof, *ST.*, 89.

²⁶ Berkhof, *ST.*, 89.

An example:

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Eph 1:11–14)

And our experience is generally...

In/by the Spirit...
Through the Son...
To the Father.

An example of what I mean:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor 13:14)

F. “The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.”²⁷

To explain what he means by “mystery,” he adds:

Man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible....The real difficulty lies in the relation in which the persons in the Godhead stand to the divine essence and to one another; and this is a difficulty which the Church cannot remove.

Louis Berkhof²⁸

VI. And so, we worship and trust him!

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor 13:14)

²⁷ Berkhof, *ST.*, 89.

²⁸ Berkhof, *ST.*, 89.

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

Class 6 – God and His Creation

2024–2025

Daniel Baker

Cornerstone Fellowship Church

I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Questions 11, 12, or 13)

Writing assignment: What are key things we need to understand about creation and providence?

In this class, we’ll think about the fact (1) God decreed all things (decree); (2) God created all things (creation); and (3) God governs all things (providence).

II. God Decreed All Things (The Doctrine of Decrees)

God has decreed in himself from all eternity all things, whatever comes to pass, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably. (TCOF 3.1)

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:36)

“All things” includes the eternal states of people. “Election” is the word we use to describe God’s eternal choice of his people to receive his salvation in Jesus Christ:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3-6)

III. God Created All Things (The Doctrine of Creation)

Thinking rightly about Day One of creation:

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was

light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen 1:1-5)

The ordering of creation – *Not at all denying the history of it but this history occurs in a symbolic and meaningful way!*

The 6 Days of Creation	
Kingdoms	Kings
Day 1 – Light/Dark “separated”	Day 4 – Sun/moon and stars “to govern”
Day 2 – Waters above/Waters below “separated”	Day 5 – Birds/Fish
Day 3 – Land/Water	Day 6 – Living creatures on land, man

Length of the 6 days of creation: 24 hours long!

- Meaning of “day” throughout the Bible – arguments that “day” can mean unspecified spans of time fall short: e.g., “day of the LORD,” “day of prosperity,” etc.
- Genesis 1 written in a clearly historical manner, as all historical narrative in the Old Testament. It is presented as historical as Gen 12 and no less. See this in the verbs used (vav-consecutive-plus-imperfect, “And God did such-and-such”).
- How Moses refers to the creation in a later passage:

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod 20:11)

IV. God Governs All Things (The Doctrine of Providence)

Providence speaks to how God governs what he has made.

God, the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures and things from the greatest even to the least by his most wise and holy providence to the end for which they were created according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will. This is all to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. (TCOF 6.1)

Providence includes 3 aspects:

- Preservation: He makes all things continue to exist.

- Cooperation: He works with all things in their God-created properties so that they accomplish his will. Though God created beans and corn from nothing in the days of creation, the more typical way we get beans and corn is by farmers planting and harvesting crops. God is cooperating with the farmers and their crops to bring about the food he has decreed.
- Government: In this context, “government” means “governing” all things to accomplish God’s glory. As Romans 11:36 says, “to him are all things.” “Government” here accents the *to him* of this verse.

A. MIRACLES

Miracles are sometimes called “extraordinary providences” (Louis Berkhof, *ST*, 176). They are still a part of his “providence.” But they are places where he does not use his typical cause-and-effect but interrupts it in an “extraordinary” way.

Gravity is typical. But sometimes God wants people to walk on water and suspends the usual way that gravity works!

B. The Problem of Evil

One of the great mysteries within God’s providence is often called “the problem of evil.”

The problem of evil: If God is all-good and all-powerful, why does evil exist?

1. The fact we live in a fallen world must be a central fact in our interpretation of the world and the lives we live. Adam’s sin affected everyone and everything (Gen 3:15–19; Rom 5:12–21; 8:19–25).
2. Acknowledging evil as a problem is really to accept the existence of God. There is no good and no evil if there is no God. All absolute standards of right and wrong or good and evil depend on the existence of a God who defines these. Alvin Plantinga makes this argument and says you can argue for the existence of God from the existence of evil.
3. God is not and cannot be the Author of sin. “Author of sin” language is often used in Reformed writings to speak of God’s connection to sin. Though he controls it, he is not the “Author” of it. The *Westminster Confession* says, “God...neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin” (*WCF* 5.4; cf. *TCOF* 6.4). John Frame says “Author” is “rarely defined” in theological writings, “but it

seems to mean both that God is the efficient cause of evil and that by causing evil he actually does something wrong.”²⁹

4. Sin and evil are never spinning out of control, but the beginning, progress, and end of them are always fully controlled by God.
5. The Bible speaks of a kind of “divine permission” where God permits a sinner to do something that violates God’s own preceptive will. Frame says that when the Reformed speak of “God’s permission,” this is not “mere permission,” for “God’s ‘permission’ is an efficacious permission.”³⁰ See Job 1–2 where Satan gets God’s permission to act. Also Romans 1:24–32 where we sin and turn away from God and then he “gives us over” to our sins even further.
6. Though God is the primary and ultimate cause of all things, evil always has a real and secondary cause. This speaks to how events have various causes, some very immediate and direct but some real but less direct. An illustration: Me breaking someone’s nose!
7. Though God is fully sovereign over all events, we sin by freely choosing to sin and not by being coerced. See this in Genesis 50:19–20:

“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.’” (Gen 50:19-20)

8. While we cannot fully remove the difficulty of the reality of sin and evil, we can provide some explanation(s) for why God would allow it to remain. 3 from John Frame³¹:
 - a) “Normative Defense: Human beings have no right to bring accusations against God.” Romans 9:19–20. He is the potter, we’re the clay.
 - b) “Situational Defense: God will always bring good out of evil.” This is what he calls “the greater-good-defense,” which means that there is a “greater good” God is pursuing than simply removing evil from our world and lives. See Romans 8:28.

²⁹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 294.

³⁰ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 297.

³¹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 301.

- c) “Existential Defense: God will comfort us so that our hearts are fully assured of the justice and rightness of his actions.” One day we shall look back on all that God has done and say with the Redeemed:

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” (Rev 15:3-4)

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him” Class 7 – The Creation of Mankind

2024–2025

Daniel Baker

Cornerstone Fellowship Church

I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Questions 14, 15, or 16)

Writing assignment: What are key things we need to understand about mankind?

II. The Special Creation of Mankind in the Garden

- A. The verb “create” (*bārah*) in Gen 1:1, 21, 27 (also Gen 2:3–4).
- B. Man is created last
- C. Man is created following “a solemn divine counsel” in Gen 1:26.³²
- D. Man is made in the image of God.
 - 1. An image is LIKE something (photograph).
 - 2. An image is UNLIKE something (it’s only a photograph!).

III. Mankind in the Image of God

These aspects of true of man and woman. We start here and then we think about ways that men and women differing according to how they’re made.

- A. **Our Soul—the non-physical part of us—that is “the principle of life”³³ in us.**

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Gen 2:7)

³² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 182.

³³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:555.

- B. The Abilities of Our Soul—emotions, thinking, determining. This is what the Bible calls our “heart.”**

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. (Prov 4:23)

- C. Our Virtues—the “knowledge, righteousness, and holiness” we had when we first created. Not morally neutral beings but an original righteousness that gave us “knowledge in the mind, righteousness in the will, holiness in the heart.”³⁴**
- D. Our Body—Just as God’s being is expressed in his Creation and he accomplishes his work using the means of the Creation (Ps 19:1), so our bodies reflect our soul and our bodies enable us to “be fruitful and multiply” and to exercise dominion over the creation (Gen 1:28).**
- E. Our Home in Paradise— The way pre-fallen man lives in paradise and fallen man must live in a cursed world images the way our holy God dwells in a realm of holiness and glory.**
- F. Our Relationships—We were made “male and female” even to become “one flesh,” reflecting our God who is Three-in-One.**
- G. Our Dominion—God called humanity to have dominion (Gen 1:28), something that reflects our God who is King and Lord over all things.**

Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! (Ps 24:8)

- H. Our Sonship—A final idea to consider is that being made in God’s image is a reminder that we are God’s children. Just as Seth was made in Adam’s “image,” so this is true of us:**

When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. (Gen 5:3)

- I. Is there anything else YOU would include? Ways you are LIKE God and yet UNLIKE God**

³⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 2:557–58.

IV. Mankind is Made for the Glory of God

“I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (Isa 43:6-7)

V. Mankind is Made with a Body and a Soul

We know this from our creation:

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Gen 2:7)

And we know this from the intermediate state (the state between our physical death and the future resurrection):

And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

VI. Mankind is Made Male and Female

NOW we begin to think about how men and women are different by design.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)

Adam and Eve are that “male and female.” There are two and only two sexes. You are one or the other.

Sex is a biological, physical, reality that is true of us from conception. It cannot be changed.

What about “gender”? Gender is a different category. Gender touches on what our sex means? What does it mean to be a man in our day? What does it mean to be a woman in our day?

In the Bible, it means something to be a man and a woman. That’s why we have commands like, “Act like men” (1 Cor 16:13). When Isaiah prophesies against

Egypt, he says they will one day “be like women, and tremble with fear” (Isa 19:16). Courage and manhood are to go together.

We can see differences in the way man and woman are created. Man created directly from God out of dust to work in the Garden. Woman is created *from the man* and *for the man* as his helpmate.

Both are given the command to “be fruitful and multiply” and “have dominion” and are “blessed” in this (Gen 1:28). And yet, their roles in this endeavor will differ.

We tried to capture these ideas in the *Trinity Catechism*:

Q14. How did God create us?

A. God created us male and female after his own image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. He gave us an immortal soul and dominion over the creatures. We are each either a man or a woman according to his good purposes for us. (Gen 1:26–28; 2:7–8, 15–18, 21–23; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; Rom 2:14–15; Eccl 7:29; Matt 10:28)

Q15. What does it mean to be a man?

A. A man is created a biological male by God to work, cultivate, and keep what is entrusted to him. Spiritually, he is a son, brother, and father; and these are potentially true in his body as well. (Gen 2:7–8, 15, 24; 1 Cor 16:13; Eph 6:4; Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 5:1; 1 Cor 11:3, 8–9)

Q16. What does it mean to be a woman?

A. A woman is created a biological female by God to help, nurture, and bring life to those given to her. Spiritually, she is a daughter, sister, and mother; and these are potentially true in her body as well. (Gen 2:18, 21, 23–24; 3:20; Rom 16:13; 1 Tim 5:2)

*Trinity Catechism*³⁵

Note the parts of the definitions in Q15–16:

1. We are created distinct from conception: “A man/woman is created a biological male/female by God”
2. We are created with a God-given vocation (calling):
 - a) Man: “created...by God to work cultivate, and keep what is entrusted to him”

³⁵ *The Trinity Catechism* (Trinity Fellowship Press, 2022).

- b) Woman: “created...by God to help, nurture, and bring life to those given to her”
3. We are created with a God-given ontology/essence:
 - a) “Spiritually, he is a son, brother, and father” (Acts 17:29; 1 Tim 5:1–2; Rom 12:10)
 - b) “Spiritually, she is a daughter, sister, and mother” (Acts 17:29; 1 Tim 5:1–2; Miriam to Moses in Exod 2:4–7; Mary and Martha in John 11; Rom 16:13)
 4. We are created with God-given *potential* in our bodies:
 - a) “These are potentially true in his body as well.”—becoming a physical brother and father (of course, he is automatically a son!).
 - b) “These are potentially true in her body as well”—becoming a physical sister and mother.

VII. Mankind is Made of One Race

We are one race:

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. (Acts 17:26)

That’s why Christians **MUST** never give in to racism, the sin of thinking one race is superior to another or inferior to another. It is a sinful partiality (James 2:1–10).

We all came from the same parents. We’re ALL COUSINS!

VIII. Conclusion

“You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve,” said Aslan. “And that is both honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth. Be content.”

C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him” Class 8 – The Covenant of Works and the Fall of Man

2024–2025

Daniel Baker

Cornerstone Fellowship Church

I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Questions 20–24)

Writing assignment: What are key things we need to understand about the covenant of works and the fall of mankind?

- A. **Reading assignment for next time: Yes, I know...pages are missing!
This was to shorten the reading just a bit.**
- B. **Schedule for January – Next class is Jan 9!**

II. Another way to think of this lesson: *Why is Christmas so amazing?*

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matt 1:18–21)

III. The Fall

- A. **Where we are in our study of theology – Revelation, God, Creation/Providence, Fall,...Redemption**
- B. **The Fall**

It is indeed remarkable how very seldom the OT refers to this history of the Fall....Nevertheless, the Fall is the silent hypothesis of the whole Biblical doctrine of sin and redemption; it does not rest only on a few vague passages, but forms an indispensable element in the revelation of salvation. The whole contemplation of man and humanity, of Nature and history, of ethical and physical evil, of redemption and the way in which to obtain it, is connected in Scripture with a

Fall, such as Genesis 3 relates to us.
Herman Bavinck³⁶

To make sense of the fall, though, we need to grasp “the covenant of works.”

IV. What is a “Covenant” in the Bible?

A. A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties that binds them to certain commitments (or promises).

1. My HOA
2. Marriage covenant

B. Covenant in the Bible

1. The way our Bible is organized: “The Old Testament” and “The New Testament.” “Testament” is from the Latin *testamentum*, which is the word used to translate Greek and Hebrew words for “covenant.”
2. Why divide the Bible like this? It shows that (1) it is a single revelation from God but (2) there is a “new covenant,” which makes “the old covenant” *old* (2 Cor 3; Luke 22:20).

C. There are many places where God makes a significant “covenant” with a person or people:

1. Adam (Gen 2:16–17; Hosea 6:7)
2. Noah (Gen 8:20–9:17)
3. Abraham (12:1–3; 15; 17:1–17; 22:15–18)
4. Moses (Exod 19–24)
5. David (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17)
6. New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Luke 22:20; 2 Cor 3; Heb 7–10)

D. In these covenants we notice some things:

1. God initiates
2. God speaks
3. God promises
4. God acts through a representative (federal) head

³⁶ Herman Bavinck, “The Fall,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

5. God inaugurates a new epoch of salvation history: *You can map the progression of salvation history with these covenants.*

V. Making Sense of the Covenant with Adam

- A. God initiates by creation (Gen 1–2) and covenant (Gen 2:16–17; Hosea 6:7)
- B. God speaks (Gen 2:16–17)
- C. God promises (Gen 2:9; 3:24; Rev 22:2, 14; Rom 5:12–19)
- D. God acts through a representative head (Rom 5:12–19) – Adam and Christ are the two heads of two humanities. Adam’s success and failure to keep the covenant will impact multitudes. And the same is true of Christ!
- E. God inaugurates a new epoch of salvation history – The history of mankind can be divided into pre-fall and post-fall.
- F. Why it’s called “a covenant of works” – Obedience is the definitive response. Where “faith” is the definitive response in the covenant of grace, “works” are the definitive response in the covenant of works.

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam and in him to his posterity, upon the condition of perfect and personal obedience.

Trinity Confession of Faith, 8.2

VI. The First Sin and the Fall of Man

- A. **Back to Genesis 3... (where not *all* of our questions get answered!)**
 - 1. Satan’s first attack: God’s Word (Gen 3:1)
 - 2. Eve’s *almost right* response (Gen 3:2–3)
 - 3. Satan’s second attack: God’s Character (Gen 3:4–5)
 - 4. Adam and Eve take the bait and sin (Gen 3:6):

When Adam and Eve disobeyed this command [in 2:17], they did become ‘like God,’ as the serpent (who deceived them into disobedience) said they would. That is, they put themselves in God’s place; they took upon themselves the right to decide how they should live and what was right and wrong for them to do. For them to become ‘like God’ in this way was

catastrophic.
Tim Keller³⁷

5. Notice the progression of sin in Gen. 3:6

VII. The Impact of the Fall of Man

A. Alienation

1. Man and himself (Gen 3:7)
2. Man and God (Gen 3:8)
3. Man and man (Gen 3:9–13)
4. Man and Creation (Gen 3:17–19)

B. Curses of Gen 3:14–19

1. Gen. 3:14: Satan vanquished—crawling on your belly is what the losers do (Ps 72:9; Isa 49:23; Micah 7:17)
2. The *protoevangelium*—first gospel!—in Gen. 3:15, that promises the final defeat of Satan (Rev 12; 20:10)
3. Gen. 3:16 – Marriage and childbirth impacted
4. Gen. 3:17–19 – creation cursed (Rom 8:19–21), work impacted, death promised

C. Cain and Abel: Gen 4: How quickly the first sin escalates!

D. Lamech: Gen 4:23: It gets worse...

E. The Flood of Noah: Gen. 6:5–6: And worse...

F. The Tower of Babel: Gen. 11: A global flood, and still we don't learn...

G. The progression of sin in Genesis 3–11 tells us of the seriousness and deadliness of Adam's sin.

H. But grace is there: Seth and Enosh in Gen. 4:26! Noah in Gen. 6:9!

³⁷ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 77.

VIII. How Adam's Sin Impacts Us: Original Sin

A. Definition

1. Not "the first sin," though it sounds like that.
2. Louis Berkhof's definition:

The sinful state and condition in which men are born...is called "original sin" (1) because it is derived from the original root of the human race; (2) because it is present in the life of every individual from the time of his birth, and therefore cannot be regarded as the result of imitation; and (3) because it is the inward root of all the actual sins that defile the life of man.

Louis Berkhof³⁸

B. Includes Original Guilt —Rom 5:12–19; Eph 2:3; 1 Cor 15:22

C. Includes Original Pollution, which means we are bent toward sin and not away from it (Gen 6:5; Rom 3:10–18).

1. Total depravity is our condition, and this means a "total inability" to please God unless he changes our hearts.
2. Romans 3:10–18 is who we are until we get a new heart (Ezek 36:25–27; John 3:3–8).
3. Sin affects our HEARTS: We love what we should hate, we hate what we should love.
4. Sin affects our MINDS: foolishness is easier than wisdom, impure thoughts are a temptation, renewing our minds is necessary (Rom 12:2).
5. Affects our BODIES: Our bodies bear the marks of the fall. Organs and cells carry diseases, sometimes fatal. Some diseases impact how our brains function (
6. Affects our MOTIVATIONS: Our desires can so easily be disordered and need to be redirected toward God and his righteousness (Gal 5:17; Matt 6:33).

D. Yet, common grace is real, so we are not as evil as we could be.

³⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 244.

IX. The Nature of Sin (the DNA of sin)

- A. “Sin” (חָטָא, *chātā*) – to “miss a mark or a way,” the bullseye being God’s preceptive will, Gen 18:20
- B. “Iniquity” (יָגַד, *ōn*) – “to bend, twist, distort,” Gen 15:6; Isa 53:6
- C. “Transgression” (עָוָן, *pesha*) – crossing God’s good and established boundary lines, Isa 43:27; 53:12
- D. “Sin” (ἁμαρτία, *hamartia*) – Used 300x in NT, “to act contrary to the will and law of God” (L&N), “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin (*hamartia*) is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).
- E. “Unclean” (נִדָּח, ἀκάθαρτος) – Used in OT and NT. Can be amoral like certain “unclean” foods (Lev 11:4) or morally “unclean” (Isa 6:6). Christ declares all foods “clean” (Mark 7:19); his blood cleanses us from all sins (Titus 2:14; Heb 9:14, 22, 23).
- F. **A definition of sin from our *Catechism***

Q23. What is sin?

A. Sin is any lack of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God. (1 John 3:4; Rom 2:14–16; 14:23; 8:7–8)

The Trinity Catechism

X. The Punishment for Sin

- A. **Alienation from God (Isa 59:2; cf. Gen 3:8; Rom 5:10; James 4:4)**
- B. **Alienation from one another (Gen 3:7–13)**
- C. **Sin as its own punishment – Rom. 1:24–32 – God “gives us over” to even greater sins**
- D. **Guilt – objective guilt (Isa 53:10) but also subjective guilt in our conscience and a sense of shame (Ezra 9:6–7; Neh 1:3; 2 Thess 3:14; Luke 22:62; Ps 51:3)**
- E. **Temporal physical/emotional punishments – blindness (Gen 19:11; 2 Kgs 6:18), sickness (Gen 12:17); plagues (Exod 7–10); flood of Noah (Gen 6–9); Babylonian captivity (Jer 20:1–6)**
- F. **Death (Gen 2:16–17)**
- G. **Suffering in the intermediate state (Luke 16:19–31)**

H. Hell (Matt 25:41; 7:23)

I. BUT—The Christian receives absolutely NONE of these!!!!

1. We receive God's fatherly discipline but NOT PUNISHMENT for sin.
2. His discipline can FEEL like punishment, but the motive and the end result are completely different.

My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline or be weary of his reproof,
¹² for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom
 he delights. (Prov 3:11–12)

XI. Conclusion

A. Grace is greater than our sins!

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 5:20–21)

B. Christ provides the complete cure for our sins:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3–4)

C. The Glory of Christmas

God did not leave us in our sins. He came to us. He came to save us from sin's punishment. He came to save us from sin's power.

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10–11)

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

Class 9 – The Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Redemption

2024–2025

Daniel Baker

Cornerstone Fellowship Church

I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Questions 25–26)

In the home stretch. You can do this!

Writing assignment for today: What are key things we need to understand about *the covenants of the Bible*

I need reading percentages from a bunch of you.

II. Covenant of Grace

Starts with the *protoevangelium*, “the first gospel,” in Genesis 3:15.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen 3:15)

Beginning here God has a new way of relating to his people. It is the way of salvation by grace through faith in the Redeemer.

Prior to this, the way he related was through the Covenant of Works made with Adam:

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” (Gen 2:16–17)

Let’s look at Genesis 3:15 in more detail:

“I will put...” – *God himself will do it. We are not asked to do anything.*
 ...enmity between you and the woman...” – *Eve is redeemed! “Enmity” with the devil is friendship with God.*

“...and between your offspring and her offspring...” – *Not just Eve but her “offspring” will be redeemed. Two peoples are spoken of here, not just two individuals. Eve’s “offspring” are the children of God. Serpent’s “offspring” are enemies of God “of the devil” (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8, 12). On this see Rev 12:1–6, 9.*

“...he will bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” – *The Redeemer is promised! Christ is the one to deal the mortal blow to the Serpent (his cross, ultimately the lake of fire in Rev 20). Yet, the devil “bruise his heel” at the cross.*

What is given here is that God will redeem a people through the work of a promised Redeemer. He will do it by his own sovereign grace (though part of his work is giving us faith/repentance).

A definition of the Covenant of Grace:

The covenant of grace is a covenant God makes with the elect sinner where he promises to save the sinner through the mediator Jesus Christ and by the Spirit empowering the response of faith.

III. The Covenant of Grace throughout the Bible

The covenant of grace is built on the idea there is only one way of salvation in the entire Bible.

When Paul preaches his gospel, he points to Genesis 15:6 a good bit: “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” He quotes this in Romans 4 and Galatians 3.

In Hebrews 11, the author looks at justification by faith and shows that it was right there in the oldest saints:

By faith **Abel** offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. 5 By faith **Enoch** was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith **Noah**, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he

condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (Heb 11:4–7)

“Faith” for these older saints is not “faith in Jesus dying on the cross” like it is for us. It’s “faith in the promises and words spoken by God.”

That’s what faith is for us, too, if you think about it:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

Faith in what God spoke, that’s what John is talking about.

This one way of salvation remains the same throughout all the key biblical covenants.

IV. The Covenants from Noah to the New Covenant

- A. Noah – Made with Noah, extends to all humanity (Gen 8:20–9:17). Promise of preservation (no more flood!), commandment to not eat blood or murder, reiterates “be fruitful and multiply.” Sign of “bow in the clouds.”**
- B. Abraham – Made with Abraham and all the true children of Abraham progressively in Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15; Gen 17:1–17; Gen 22:18. Includes us! (Gal 3:29).**
- C. Moses – Made with Israel at Mt. Sinai in Exod 19–24. This covenant lasted 1500 years but became “the old covenant” when Christ inaugurated “the new covenant.”**
- D. David – promised in 2 Sam 7:12–13, fulfilled in Jesus the greater “Son of David” (Matt 1:1–18).**
- E. New Covenant – promised in Jer 31:31–34, inaugurated at Jesus’s cross (Luke 22:20).**

V. The Covenant of Redemption

But the Bible points to yet another covenant, a covenant made before time between the members of the Trinity.

None of the covenants above would have happened if there was not already a commitment on the part of God to save his people. This is an eternal covenant, made in eternity past.

In this eternal covenant the Father planned the way of salvation, the Son would be the Redeemer to accomplish the work of redemption, the Spirit would apply this work to the elect through regeneration and sanctification.

Remember, we were chosen “before the foundation of the world” to belong to God (Eph 1:4–5).

Some of the passages that point to this eternal covenant of redemption:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. 5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 6 “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, 7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. (Isa 42:1-7)

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Psalms 2

Psalms 110:1, 4

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (John 10:18)

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (John 17:6)

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, (Luke 22:29) – Berkhof notes that “assign” is related to the word for “covenant.”

Note the very personal nature of these Scriptures. The Father, Son, and Spirit are very personally involved in these commitments. Just as the covenants connected to the covenant of grace are very personal and descriptive, so these passages are very personal and descriptive.

Bavinck notes that “the covenant of redemption” was not developed quickly by Reformed theologians. It took time to develop.

VI. The Eight Covenants in their Chronological Order

- A. The Covenant of Redemption (eternity past)**
- B. The Covenant of Works (Gen 2:16–17)**
- C. The Covenant of Grace (Gen 3:15)**
- D. The Covenant with Noah (Gen 8:20–9:17)**
- E. The Covenant with Abraham (Gen 12–22)**
- F. The Covenant with Moses/Israel (Exod 19–24)**
- G. The Covenant with David (2 Sam 7)**
- H. The New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Luke 22:20)**

VII. For Next Time: The Redeemer!

Everything we talked about with the covenant of grace depends on the “offspring” of Eve crushing the Serpent. Without that victory, we’re doomed.