

# Thinking about God

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Preacher: Harvey Guest

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Bill. I'm just going to do a preface, a very short preface, and then an introduction, and then a talk, and then a conclusion, and then over to you. There's the outline for today.

A preface, therefore, this happens in prefaces, doesn't it? Or I think it should. I'm waiting to read a book with the traditional preface in it in which the author begins, All within, dear reader of value, is my own.

Those with whom I'd all collaborated in the writing are responsible for that which is of less value.

Turn it around, the usual kind of stuff you get. That's what they're really thinking.

Why did I ask? Whatever. In thinking, that's my way of saying that in thinking about God, that's our topic title today, thinking about God, in doing that, I desire to say nothing but what the central Christian tradition says about God and about thinking about God.

There's a distinction there. Nothing at all that departs therefrom. If I do, I stand, I want to be corrected. This thinking about God is, of course, it's the merest outline.

[ 1 : 19 ] Maybe it always remains, in a sense, the merest outline. But I hope that that is, I think it, I hope it's of value nevertheless. So, just a bit more preface.

I've received much help from a former Oxford philosopher, Richard Swinburne, who writes much about these matters, thinking about God.

Anything good which follows, therefore, is from him, I want to say. But more, and he would agree with this, I'm sure, a man like Mr. Swinburne, this anything good is from the above mentioned, I'll call it again, the central Christian tradition, as it thinks about God.

A tradition which, of course, seeks submission to Scripture, as it thinks about God. To order its thought therein, in Scripture.

And to rejoice in this thought, because it really is God's thought about himself. God's thought about himself, given to us to rejoice in.

[ 2 : 34 ] You don't really, you shouldn't be too interested in your own thoughts about God. But if you have access to God's thoughts about God, you should be very interested in that.

And that's what I desire to reflect today. The Christian traditions, thoughts in Scripture, from Scripture, although frequently it doesn't sound like Scripture.

And sometimes that's helpful, sometimes people find that unhelpful. So again, thinking about, there's the end of the preface. Thinking about God is again today's announced topic, our focus.

It is frequent, I would think it's quite frequent, that we respond to such a proposed topic, this was prophetic of Bill's comments, I now realize, with some hesitation.

People have strange Freudian responses, apparently Bill was telling you. Maybe even some irritation about announcing that we're going to meditate together on thinking about God.

[ 3 : 40 ] And this happens, I think, from believers and non-believers alike. Here we frequently just simply get, we know we've had conversations about this kind of thing and we just get bogged down.

Our vocabulary about these things is sometimes quite vague. The conversation partners share little of any common ground frequently when we talk about these things.

It seems unreal somehow, this conversation, to think about God. Words which are infrequent make an appearance in these conversations.

And for some that raises suspicion. God is a being, said a smart aleck once, I don't know who said this. God is a being who spends his time having his existence proven and disproven.

But we today will press on in this area. And if not to remove the problems associated with this amazing subject matter, at least to ameliorate their power, we might begin with a few preliminary observations in this introduction.

[ 4 : 49 ] Things about which we are perfectly familiar, it has been observed by some very respectable people, are nevertheless these things not at all easy to discuss.

It's strange. Upon reflection, it's been pointed out, that even to talk about such a simple and obvious things as, say, fragrance, or the subject of color, if you discuss these things at all, it begins to challenge our powers of observation and description.

So therefore, in merely having difficulty in thinking about God, doesn't mean that the object is the problem. There's often obvious truths that it's difficult to reflect upon.

That lack of common ground, cultural life experiences, opportunities for reflection. In our culture, we often emphasize gender, if that ground is different, is a call not for despair, but for patient and costly inquiry.

Thinking about great things is costly and painful and difficult, isn't it? But it's worth the effort. And the issue of infrequent words, words that we don't use very often, simply we should remind ourselves, infrequent words, difficult words, simply indicate a desire often for clarity and precision.

[ 6 : 23 ] And the theological tradition, for instance, has all sorts of words of a unique vocabulary, so that we can think about God with more precision. And if we, if I, think of them as a sign of vanity merely, that may just be a sign of my laziness.

The vanity of the common man, C.S. Lewis talked about that, is a real something. It's at work in our culture. And Christians should know themselves in these things.

So there you go. Yes, we do get bogged down. But we approach one, don't we, when we think about God, who has said, and this has broad application, and so it is appropriate here, I trust.

I trust I'm not misusing scripture. We approach one when we think about God, who said, my thoughts are not your thoughts. My ways are, said God, are not your ways, through the prophet. So here is a challenge, you see, but the scriptures do not indicate that thinking about God is, that there's some sort of insufferable barrier to that.

[ 7 : 34 ] We can think about God. So, thinking about God, as this introduction draws to a close. A pietist motto, across this German philosopher, Hediger of all people, he apparently liked this motto, but a pietist motto, in the German pietist tradition, runs, have you ever heard this?

To think is to thank. That's a lovely, a lovely motto, for one's thinking life. To think, is to thank. Surely that resonates with a Christian, it's true. To think is to thank. So if we edge, ever so slightly, to thanks, as we think about God, surely we'll be blessed, in a little bit of work, in this area.

So, let me say a prayer, before we move into the body of this. Lord, may you bless our inquiry today, as we think about thinking about God, into your blessed reality, into your great glory, and your infinite, your holy beauty.

Lord, we would know more of you, in the mystery of Jesus. Amen. Amen. I could start, just with a footnote. Why not? Christians, and others, believe that God, is neither male, nor female.

[ 9 : 07 ] But, for reasons, I think I've got this right, some learned people in this room, who will tell me after, if I haven't. But, for reasons, historical, and biblical, and even ontological, of the way reality itself, really is, that is according, to the order, of being itself.

He, is the language, which, the tradition, uses, and wants to remain with. And so, I will stay with he. I'll use that language.

If that's a problem, for some people, my apologies. So, I'll get that out of the way, right away, in a footnote. How do Christians, talk about, how do Christians, talk about, or how do we, can we say, define, define God?

I'm going to put these, these, some big words, in front of you, right off the bat, leave them there. How do Christians, think about, or define God? Well, a brief go at this, follows.

To start with, in the tradition, God is often, talked about, as a divine, person. A divine, person.

[ 10 : 23 ] Not a person, quite in the same sense, that we, are persons, but, more of that later. God is a divine, person. The tradition, also talks much about, and I know you, totally familiar, with these words.

God is often, spoken out about, of as, omnipotent. Second word there, omnipotent. God is also, third word down there, God is often, spoken of, as one who is, omniscient, omniscient, knows everything.

Fourthly, down our list, God is spoken of, as, free. We would say, infinitely free. God is free.

And finally, God is spoken of, in the tradition, as, this is a bit more, strange, isn't it? God is necessary. Nobody in this room, as far as I know, considers themselves, necessary.

Your very being. God is, is necessary. There we have it. These terms, are clarified, right off the bat, by way of, contrast.

[ 11 : 36 ] It seems to me, by way of contrast. Meaning, simply this, all in this room, today, would claim to be, persons, wouldn't you? Everyone.

Hands up, if you don't think, you're a person. All would claim, knowledge, of, of, of some kind, of, you, you have some, which relates, this omniscient word, all claim knowledge, all claim, some kind of, power, in some measure, you were able, to get yourself, out of bed this morning, and get yourself, to St. John's.

You needed, power, to do that. All of you, I take it, would claim, some, freedom, in your life.

Number, number four there. You, you possess, knowledge, you possess, knowledge, that you have, some kind of, of, power, to form, to form, to do things.

So, you have some kind, of freedom, in your life. You have some, sort of, knowledge, of what are, what are called, volitions. I'm deciding, right now, to raise my left arm. I'm deciding, to do that.

None of us, this last word, necessary, none of us, except some, who are off, their medication, again, this morning, would claim, would claim, that they are, necessary beings.

[ 12 : 58 ] I am, I, I just could not, not exist. No, there's a reason, something caused you. You're not necessary. Well, in another sense, you are necessary, of course.

Necessary, of course, is aligned with, a more common word, like eternal, isn't it? God is eternal.

God is, everlasting. The scriptures, are forever telling us, that God is, everlasting.

I really, really do I, I don't know about you, really do I just stop, and say, why am I told this? Is that just, a casual, compliment word, that gets thrown at God?

It deserves, our thought, and in a sense, it means, God is necessary. There never was a time, when God wasn't. There never will be a time, when God isn't.

There was a time, when none of us existed. God was there then. There never was a time, back, back, back, as we think of time, when God wasn't.

[ 13 : 59 ] God, necessarily, God exists. He's everlasting. I love the anecdote, you need humor, when you talk about God, in these terms, in these ways.

I love the anecdote, apparently told by Yugoslavians, who lived under the famous, Marshall Tito, you know, a man famous, in the last century, a man apparently, not noted for his humility.

It was said by Yugoslavians, that Tito's will, began with the words, if I die. What is, how his lawyer responded to that, if I die.

We have likenesses to God, but our God is different, than we are. God is necessary, repeating myself, God is eternal.

eternal. We, are not. We may think, that we're going to go on forever, for instance, but we're not. We have a terminus point.

[ 15 : 04 ] God is necessary, eternal, everlasting. The scriptures, again, tell us this, and this tradition of thought, makes you stop, and think about it. I think it has value, in that regard.

Another footnote, why do we confess, in the creed, I believe, in the life everlasting? We do get a bit uppity, about ourselves, in the creed, in a sense.

Some unbelievers think, wow, you Christians, got a lot of strange beliefs, about yourself. I'm going to go on forever. I just, sort of, contradicted that, didn't I?

But no, the creed says, I believe, in life everlasting. And the answer is, because the divine person, the first thing, up there, has taken, our nature, up into his mystery, his Trinitarian mystery.

We get involved, with this divine person. So, there's a footnote, to remember, as you say, I believe, in life everlasting. Interesting, that as you think, about God, in these terms, divine person, omnipotent, omniscient, free, and necessary, that I think, issues like, likeness to God, contrast to God, and difference, are at work in us, they begin to work in us, and as we think, about God, I think this thinking, changes us.

[ 16 : 29 ] I don't know about you, I find this kind of tradition, of thought about God, helpful. It gets me, into the mystery, of scripture, more than I would, otherwise be. Again, here are things, about God, which, the Christian tradition, puts in front of us, a divine person, who is, all power, that's what omnipotent means, doesn't it?

All knowledge, that's what omniscient means, who has perfect freedom, and who necessarily exists. These mean, in a sense, don't you, you want to unfold, these kind of big words, these mean, that God has, do you agree with me?

No limits. I have lots of limits. I have friends, who tell me that frequently. I have lots of limits. God has no limits. We have limits. God has none. God has no limits. Usually, always, I think it's always, the word, infinite, is meant, or used, to capture, to give us, a kind of grip, on this idea, on this concept, of no limits.

Infinite, is quite a usual word, amongst we religious people, infinite. God's love is infinite, you know, on Valentine's Day. God has no limits. An idea, which is, quite difficult, to get a grip on.

[18:03] Infinite, without limits. There's a story, you've probably heard it, probably you haven't heard it, actually. The Archangel Gabriel, I read this in a theologian, so it must be okay, it's not impious.

Very conservative. The Archangel Gabriel, the Archangel Gabriel, said to our creator, one day, a German theologian, has recently said, that you are a, you are a series, of essences, of which the world, is in constant approximation.

And our creator, said to Gabriel, what do you think, that means? And Gabriel said, Gabriel said, no one knows, but we've got, Augustine working on it.

That story, is my way of telling you, how highly regarded, this chap, the Bishop of Hippo, has been in Christian history. He's a great contributor, to this tradition, this central Christian tradition, of thinking about God.

The Orthodox Church, as you will know, has registered, some reservations, about the Bishop of Hippo, but his influence, Augustine's influence, has been enormous. That's all my way of saying, when no limits, is thought about, again, what are we to think?

[19:32] This God, that we pray to, that we, do think about, we talk about, a lot, especially, when you go to church, you want to get a grip, on some of these ideas, infinite, no limits.

Augustine, has a, has a go at no limits, as I understand him, this is what he's doing here, by saying, perhaps you've heard this, Augustine was, a great rhetorician, he was a great teacher, but he says, he says somewhere, God, is a circle, with center, everywhere, circumference, nowhere.

I'm beginning to get, a sense of no limits, a sense of awe, at it more than, a conceptual grasp, on that. The psalmist says, where may I go, from your spirit?

The psalmist knows that. Where, where could I go, where you're not? The answer is, of course, nowhere. God is a circle, center, everywhere.

Circumference, nowhere. God has no circumference. He's a mysterious circle, isn't he? So God's, when you get to, an idea of freedom here, God's perfect freedom, means, that, no distance, for instance, limits God.

[20:59] No distance, limits him. As the psalmist says, that's why, God's freedom, implies his, omnipresent, it's often called. You might have expected, that to be on this list, but it's an implication, from God's perfect freedom.

His infinite freedom. Distance, implies some limits. Like, I'm not somewhere. But God never says, I'm not somewhere. God is everywhere.

All of God, is everywhere. All of God, is everywhere. He's not, a bit here, and a bit over there. He is, all of himself, everywhere.

What a thought that is. I find that, very moving. A very busy person, will sometimes say, if only I could be, in two places at once. You know, it's a common, a common observation, about life.

God does not have this problem. He's everywhere. All of him, everywhere. Where can I go, from your spirit? Jesus said, didn't he, that, God is spirit.

[22:06] God, one of our Lord's, deeply, if I may call it this, philosophical, statements. God is spirit. Do you know what that means? I don't always have, a total grip on that.

Spirit means, I think, at least, that which crosses, all boundaries. A perfect spirit. Spirit means, that which crosses, boundaries. Our Olympic team, has a certain spirit, to it this year.

It's going to win, all the gold medals. Just last them. There's a kind of spirit, that crosses, boundaries. It catches people, up in it.

God is spirit, therefore. God is, perfect freedom. God is, infinite freedom. He crosses, all boundaries. He, because God is, there are boundaries.

God is, perfect freedom. Already, you can, sight of see, I hope you see, that these, these, virtues, which are God, these powers, which are God, these, perfections, some theologians, call God, Barth calls them, God's perfections, rather than his attributes.

[ 23 : 19 ] These, they speak to one another. Persons, for instance, form that first one, God's a person. Persons, form intentions, and act upon them, don't they?

We do this, all the time, and God does this. Again, we do it with limits, but God does it without limits. So, actions, without limits, and which express, perfectly, God's will, will be, good actions, for you. Ever thought of that? God has no limits. So, everything he does, is without, any limitation on it. And therefore, it will always express, God's will, for you.

It will be, God's good actions, for you. That's a bit vague, I know, but it's, a truth implicit, in the tradition. With you, and for you, God has always, and God will always, he will always, do the best possible thing.

He will always do, the best possible action, for you. Because God has no limits, he can do that. God always does, the best thing, for you.

[ 24 : 38 ] God, therefore, is never limited, in his ability, to do the best thing. That's a happy thought, about God. God has no limits.

He's never limited, in his ability, to do the best thing, for you. That's because, God is love. The infinite person, who has all power, who knows everything, who's perfectly free, who's necessarily there, Christians confess, is love.

And therefore, will always do, the best for you. We form intentions, or we see, in us, there are volitions, that form, things we want to do.

What causes, these volitions in us, these acts of will, we don't know. That's a mystery to us. We don't know, why we do, what we do.

We form, we have volitions, but we don't know, what causes them. We don't know. God's acts, of will, are perfectly, transparent, to God. God knows, himself perfectly.

[ 25 : 47 ] That would be, a limit on God, if he didn't know, himself perfectly. In that, would you agree, that our creator, is infinitely, almost infinitely, different from us.

Here's a sense, in which God, God is a divine person, we're persons, but here's, a difference, which seems, unfathomable. That just seems, incomprehensible, to us.

It seems, that it's, incomprehensible, to me, that God, could know himself, perfectly. Is this God, God, as, in this, God as person, is beheld in awe, would you agree?

Why do we pray, for instance, to bring this down to, the real actions, of piety, in the, in the, in the church? Why do we pray, a prayer like, Almighty God, unto whom, all hearts are open, all desires know, no secrets, are hid from you?

I think, I think, the answer is, because, God is, transparent, to himself, and therefore, we are, transparent, to him.

[ 26 : 58 ] Something's, going on there, that I don't understand. You can help me, in the question and answer time. Almighty God, unto you, our hearts are open, you know, all of our desires, from you, there are no secrets hid.

And then, and then, it's because, apparently, that God, knows himself perfectly. We could never know, ourselves perfectly. Almighty, just to run through, some more of these words, omnipotent, or almighty, God may do, do you like this kind of thought?

I do, I do, not too much. God may do, all logically possible things. Could God cause me, to exist, for instance, and not to exist, at the same time?

You've got some smart aleck, over coffee, say that kind of thing. Well, the answer seems to be, no. And that is not a limit, on God's power.

It just means, that God does not, uphold nonsense. That's all that kind of, little logical conundrum, really comes down to. God doesn't, uphold nonsense. This is not, a cold abstraction, it seems to me.

[ 28 : 12 ] Have you ever felt, that? Have you ever been, encouraged, by being told, that with God, all things are possible? I have. Does that, does that comfort you?

It does me. With God, all things are possible, because God is omnipotent. He's almighty. He even, calls the stars, by name, the psalm says.

Imagine, what kind of a God, could do that. Who created these, says God, through Isaiah. You know, to think that, that power is for you today.

That almightiness, is for you. I know that's, basic stuff. That's from your, Sunday school days. I need to be reminded of it. Which leads, of course, again to, God as omniscient.

God knows everything. He's all knowing. The same psalm, Psalm 147, says his understanding, is infinite. God's understanding, is infinite.

[ 29 : 16 ] God's understanding, is without limits. We know, some things, we have some, true beliefs, and we've got, a lot of false beliefs, undoubtedly, all the time.

We are limited, in knowledge, and always will be, won't I? Then, but then, Paul uses this kind of language, doesn't he? Then shall I know, even as I am known.

Then, not now. He's looking forward, to some great, knowledge of himself. Then shall I know, even as I am known. Now, he says famously, now we see, in a glass, darkly, in a mirror, darkly.

Which means something, doesn't it? The, the power of sin, over your mind, what the tradition calls, usually, the noetic effects, of sin.

The power of sin, over your mind, will just simply, disappear, in God's presence. Is that true? I hope it's true. If not, that's something better, Lewis would say.

[ 30 : 19 ] What sin does, to our minds, will disappear, will be set free, from that. But our, our created contingency, even in heaven, I take it, will remain, as we grow, forever in heaven.

Isn't that a great thought? Heaven will, apparently, annihilate, even the possibility, of boredom. Because, God is without limits.

So you'll be able, to explore God, for an infinity, of time, if, I think there is time, in heaven, for whatever eternity is, and never get bored.

That seems impossible. You'll never get, worldly sophisticates, I sometimes think, have you ever, seen that little look, that comes, oh yeah, be boring in heaven, singing all the time, with church people, there's a thought.

But, no, infinite, infinite, infinite is our God, and the power, to explore his beauty, forever, without the cloudiness, of sin, will just disappear, will be free, of the horror, of boredom, forever.

[ 31 : 34 ] I think in heaven, you won't even remember, what boredom was. Why was I ever bored? What was boredom? No, boredom is a sign, of our fallenness.

God will get rid of that. We'll never get bored, in heaven. God is again, free, free, to be everywhere, we said earlier.

And that is why, and this comes up, in the central, Christian tradition, and it's an implication, from some of the things, up here, God does not, does he, all instructed Christians, have always known, from the earliest days, till today, God has, no body.

God does not have a body, one of these. No body. Although, body, strangely enough, in the Christian story, is not foreign to God.

He, in Jesus Christ, took up life, in a body, apparently, forever. There is a mystery. So, God's, freedom, I love this idea, this idea helps me a lot.

[ 32 : 41 ] God's freedom, is of course, it expresses his transcendence. It's a common word, that people like to use nowadays. I think it's a good word. But God is not a prisoner, of his transcendence.

Some people, again, sophisticates say, have you heard them, it goes, you can't, you can't have thoughts, about God, that are true, because God is too, infinitely, other, than you are.

He's too, infinitely, other than our minds. Listen to that, that's, that's a true statement, I think, but Christians have to say, yes, but it goes even further, than that. God is not a prisoner, of that transcendence.

He can, make himself known. He can make himself, thinkable, to a creature. And in Jesus, the rabbi, he was, and he questions, imagine Jesus, saying after one of his parables, to someone like, Professor Slaymaker, and he questions, because, he's associated, with these parables, deeply.

Our Lord, made himself known. You can think, thoughts about God, now which are true thoughts, because God's not a prisoner, of his transcendence. He can tell you, I'm a divine person. He can tell you, I have all power.

[ 33 : 54 ] I have all knowledge. I am infinitely free. I, in fact, am necessary. God can tell you, these true propositions, about himself, and they're true. To deny them, is not true.

To deny these things, is dishonoring, to God, I think. We can know, these truths, about God, in our, in our Christian story, God is free again, to be everywhere.

And, that implies, God does not have a body. Although, in Palestine, 2,000 years ago, and somehow, in the mystery, of his right hand now, there is a person, the body.

An eternal, transcendent, glorious body. The kind, that we are going, to be given, apparently. What a thought. All of these things, about God, again, I think they should be called, God's perfections. What God really is, in his perfections. These, no limits, things, make again, they make of God, they make of him, a necessary being.

[ 35 : 03 ] Again, that's, yes, that's a good thought, to have of God. It creates a, a sense of his mystery. When you pray, it's wonderful, I find it wonderful, to think, that the one, I'm speaking to, necessarily, is there.

He's not contingent. He'll, he outlasts, all universes. He outlasts, all thoughts. He outlasts, say, the thoughts of Stephen Hawking, about himself.

I saw a documentary, the other day, on Stephen Hawking, he was quite confidently, telling us, that the world, came from nowhere. No, that's wrong. It came from God. He's got it wrong. No.

God is necessarily there. There is nothing, that causes God. Nothing, conditions God. No, space. No, time.

The Greeks thought, that maybe, there was a fate. A deep, eternal power, that even the gods, small g gods, were under its control.

[ 36 : 03 ] No, our God is, not under any fate. He doesn't live in any space, because He created space. He doesn't live in any time, necessarily, because He created time.

He created the, He created space and time. That's what our God did. It is important, it's important to see, that the creed says, that God created everything, and includes, the creed says, visible, and invisible.

You may have a, a dark thought, in the back of your mind, that, maybe, there's some invisible power, that God, is under its control, like fate, the Greeks thought.

We can, get rid of that unbelief, by remembering, that everything, that is invisible, God created it. Even though, I can't name it, that power. God isn't under it.

No, He's free, infinitely free. He created, whatever invisible things, are there, He created it. The philosophers, and theologians, I know some of you, need this, on a Sunday morning, they call this God's, if you will, His ontological necessity.

[ 37 : 15 ] We do need some of those, I said in the introduction, some of those funny words. God, is necessarily there. Some thinkers, we Anglicans, always like to remember Him, don't we?

Saint Anselm, who flourished about 1,000, an Archbishop of Canterbury, he thought that God, is also, logically necessary. Famously, one of our very own, Anglican thinkers, made it big, with this argument.

Though it's been, held, in some content, by other, other philosophers. It is, you know how that, argument goes, it is illogical, therefore, Anselm says, to believe, that God does not exist.

It just is illogical, to think, that He doesn't exist. And the argument, goes something like, you know, we won't go into this, but involves saying, that God is the greatest being. The scriptures call God, I always think, that there's some connection here, the most high God.

God the most high. So, a philosopher, like, a philosopher-minded, kind of chap, like Anselm, who was undoubtedly a genius, like our current Archbishop, I think.

[ 38 : 23 ] He thought, oh yeah, God is the greatest being, and since existing is necessary, to be the greatest being, it's impossible to deny, that He exists. Our Archbishop thought, he had the world of philosophy, just backed into a corner, with this argument.

You know, you've got to think, that God exists. A footnote to this, a footnote to this is, I find these things interesting, other people usually don't, but I'll bore you with this.

In a still somewhat, recent history, of Western philosophy, by Anthony Kenny, I believe his name is. He's a very respectable, reviewer, if you will, of the whole tradition, of that kind of thought, philosophical thought.

He recounts briefly, the history, of Anselm's argument, and ends it by saying, two things, I found very interesting, just read this recently, that he says, that Bertrand Russell, we've talked about Bertrand Russell, in this play, he's a student of Russell, Kenny says, that Russell decisively, informally, refuted Anselm's argument, using some form, of modal logic.

But then he continues, that a chap named, Alvin Plantinga, a Christian philosopher, at Notre Dame, you'll know his name, any of you, he has shown, says Kenny, that Russell's argument, is a failure, and has again, established, established, the warranted status, if you will, of this argument.

[ 39 : 49 ] Some people think, that Anselm's argument, still has life in it, is still kicking. So there you go, maybe God is, even logically necessary, I don't know, if I believe that or not.

Some philosophers, think that that argument, hasn't been refuted yet, from our archbishop, our sainted, late archbishop. These again, are, divine person, all power, all knowledge, infinitely free, and therefore necessary.

These are God's, essential properties. This is what, this is what God, necessarily is. God is, necessarily, this.

Now this is the, I want in the discussion time, you to come to me, with your questions, and your, whatever comments. Because this is the thing, I'm trying to come to grips with, in these kinds of things, and Richard Swinbur, tries to give you some help on this.

These are deep waters. What he calls, there is no underlying, this-ness. I should have put this word up there, on the overhead, in God. T-H-I-S, one word, T-H-I-S-N-E-S-S, this-ness.

[ 41 : 03 ] When was the last time, you used the word, this-ness? I hope not too frequently. There is no underlying, this-ness, in our God.

We might pause here, and ask, I have to, what is this-ness? Well, a kind of negative definition, helps. And again, this is from Richard Swinbur, any God, with these essential properties, it isn't an accident, that he's God, he just is God.

If you have, all of those characteristics, I hope no one, puts their hands up. You are God. You just are God. You don't, it isn't a happenstance, that you're the God, of all things, of all thinkable things, of God, of all things, visible and invisible.

No, you are God. There's no, underlying, something, that God has, plus these attributes, these perfections. No, these are, this is God. There's no, we have this-ness in us.

Yes, I could not exist. There's a, a final me, that could just not be here. But God has no, that's, that is not in God's character. That's not in God's being.

[ 42 : 15 ] Any God with these essential properties, again, is God. God equals these properties, again. I found the last couple weeks, I found these words helpful.

I just enjoyed saying them. You may think that's strange. Well, maybe it is. I get too much coffee or something. Divine person. Divine person. You prayed, did you pray this morning?

I hope you did. It's a Christian discipline, in the morning to pray. You prayed to a divine person, who has all power, who has all knowledge, who is infinitely free, who is necessarily there.

And you were having a conversation with him this morning. Perhaps you were listening to him, as Bill likes to emphasize. Listening to this God, God, no other God, no other rinky-dinky little stupid God.

This is God. He's like this. There it is. I know, you know, we all know that, again, we might not exist, but God knows that he necessarily exists, because he has these perfections.

[ 43 : 29 ] There is no other thing holding together these perfections. Again, that's a challenging idea about God's thisness, and it's, he doesn't have it.

We have thisness, God does not have that. It's a challenging idea, but I hope it is even more than that. God is not a person, therefore, as we said at the beginning, in our sense.

He's not less than we are. He is personal, but he is divinely personal. And that creates a sense of awe.

It does for me. This, I think, is the intellectual thinking equivalent of the burning bush moment. For me, it is. Scripture does have these moments in it.

Who are you? Moses asks. In the presence of what am I here? When you pray, who listens?

Moses, you'll recall, heard simply the infinite mystery of something like, apparently, I am.

[ 44 : 35 ] I am. What an answer that is. I am. You pray today to, I am. Infinite.

What a God you speak to, who can do all things. Nothing holds him back. He'll always do the very best possible thing that he can for you. Because he's so infinitely perfect in his knowledge of you.

You are transparent to him, as he is transparent to himself. Wow. Since we are now in deep waters and time runs by, why not conclude with the deepest water that we know about?

On Valentine's, I hadn't realized this was Valentine's Day. God is love. Perfect love. God is love. And perfect love.

Perfect love. Perfect love. Remember this God without limits. Loves another. He has to. He has to love another. So God is Father eternally, loving his eternal Son.

[ 45 : 41 ] Perfect. He is this love. So eternally and necessarily, this love desires perfect expression and fruition.

Each desires the other to be perfectly loved. So eternally proceeds a third person, an infinitely perfect expression of their love, the Spirit.

A divine person, therefore, is necessarily, I love this phrase, it comes in the tradition, I think, the medieval theologians sometimes thought of God as a divine society of love.

Necessarily. Swinburne surprises me when he claims, he believes, that if you had enough time to think about it, and you thought about God, and you thought about these perfections, you would know, through your reason, the doctrine of the Trinity.

I'm not sure about that one, but that's what he thinks. The early church saw Scripture, at its best, this early church, saw Scripture saying like, and again, I head towards a conclusion here, the early church who just studied Scripture, just stared at it, and it saw things like, I and my Father are one.

[ 47 : 02 ] But it also saw in Scripture, my Father is greater than I. The Son committing himself, committing his Spirit into the Father's hands.

These are different actions by the one we call God, mysteriously. A man, for instance, so much later in the tradition, John Owen, intuited, I think, if I've got him right here, he's such a complicated thinker at times.

He intuited that prayer may be, it can't be separated, but it may be distinguished that we pray to Father sometimes. Sometimes we pray to Son.

Sometimes we pray to Spirit. And he thought that we may know, with some measure of spiritual maturity, who you're praying to. And the Trinity allows that, in a sense.

They are one, this divine person, but they are different. One different, and yet one divine person.

[ 48 : 08 ] Listen, this God that we talk away about at church and in our own minds is wonderful. Just wonderful, isn't he?

To have, this God is better than any God I can think about. Any other God I've ever heard about. The different portrayals in Holy Scripture of Father, Son, and Spirit are not arbitrary.

They mean for us. We may learn to enter into what they mean for us. God the Creator, God the Redeemer, God the Sanctifier.

Scripture distinguishes, doesn't it, between God, Father Creator, Son Redeemer, Spirit Sanctifier. Their actions for us in redemption come from their very, their real status, if you will, in the Trinity. And for anybody here who hasn't been listening, and I'll punish you with this footnote. The Father, therefore, is ontologically necessary.

[ 49 : 15 ] The Son and the Spirit, they are metaphysically necessary. God is very strange.

Metaphysically necessary means necessarily dependent on an ontologically necessary being.

You can go that far into thinking about God and His tradition if you want. It's pretty thin air up there, I admit it. Again, we've got St. Augustine working on that one, too, I think.

At the beginning, we talked about some hesitation, in conclusion, really. Begin, we talked about some hesitation that might make us pause before, or when we think about God in this manner.

And I know I dismissed that hesitation, didn't I? But maybe hesitation is good if, for instance, we could rename it, we could call it reserve.

Maybe that's a good, I think that's a good Anglican word. Anglicans are reserved. This reserve, I think, again, is a good thing. It is not unbelief reserved.

[ 50 : 22 ] It is not a hesitation to believe fully. Reserve, I take it, is a nice, is another word for humility, is it? Or knowing that we easily fall into vanity when we think about such high matters.

believers. It was, I'll quote him one more time, it was Augustine, that invaluable man who has guided the church so wisely, so often, surely.

He would say, do you know, do you know this expression of Augustine? He would say, this is famous, I know, he'd say, this also is thou. He's thinking about his creator God.

This also is thou, neither is this thou. He sort of drew back from his own thinking. Yes, this is you.

This is what you've revealed yourself to be, but neither is it.

It's only words, and I know you're giving it to us, waiting upon its fulfillment in the perfect future. Our thoughts about God are good, aren't they?

[ 51 : 25 ] I hope they're good. We may say yes to them, and yet we do not mistake them, oh, never, for the full reality. Never, never, never. Hence, again, I think this reserve about this kind of thing.

Okay, I like divine person, omnipotent, omniscient, free and necessary, okay, but I don't want to get caught up, maybe there's a vanity in this. I need to be reserved. Wait upon the unfolding of that. If not this, as C.S. Lewis used to say in the, whenever Lewis said something about heaven, I think he was very wise in this. You know, Lewis used to say, well, if not this, then something better. That's a very wise thing. He would think about the fruition of our desires and how heaven could possibly work itself out for finite creatures like ourselves. Then after he did, he expresses his reserve by saying, well, if not this, something even better. Well, divine person, omnipotent, omniscient, free, necessary, if not that, something even better. But I can't imagine a better description of that kind of thing. I like that. [ 52 : 33 ] So with this reserve, we can just say that we adore, we adore this divine person, this society of love as the gospel reveals it to be, who has all power and all knowledge.

We can adore his perfect freedom. I love it, by the way, there's a moment in a psalm, I should have looked it up, I don't have the psalm number, some of you will, where the psalmist, he worships God's power, God's infinite, perfect power.

He can speak the universe into existence. He can speak away whatever is your problem today in his own timing. He can say, go away. And it will. This is the God we believe in.

We adore this freedom. We even can learn, perhaps, to ignore, to acknowledge and adore, adore, his, not ignore, adore, his perfect necessity.

He has to be there, this God. I was not sure how to conclude this talk. I was going to end it with that. That's flat. But this morning, I happened to open the Bible and one of my passages was, no man has seen God at any time.

[ 53 : 46 ] 1 John 4, 12, this verse. No one has seen God at any time. That is, he's speaking of God in himself, surely there. No one has seen God at any time.

Then he says, if we love one another, God dwells in us and his love is perfected in us. I thought, that's even better than what I'm trying to say today.

If we love one another, God dwells in us and his love is perfected in us. Here is where, do you agree, the deepest progress is made and will be made in our thinking about and perhaps moving on to more important things like knowing God.

Still think someone should write a book on that title. There's where the progress is made. It is in love where in your neighbor, in loving your neighbor, you actually see God.

You've already seen God today in your neighbor if you love your neighbor. So this could be a place where you begin to see God in your neighbor, in loving them.

[ 54 : 53 ] There's an outline of thinking about God, inadequate, open to endless correction. But it seeks to humbly just be a review, a look at the central tradition.

I think it's faithful to what I hope it is. So we need to have a question and answer time and first a word of prayer to make you gentle. Let me say, Lord, thank you for revealing yourself to us in Israel, in Jesus, the mystery of the unfolding of your person as a society of love.

May we know you, this God of love, and may we love one another as you have commanded us.

Help us to think about these things with a degree of maturity which brings honor to your name and would be of great benefit to us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. In Jesus' name, Amen. It seems to me I first thought that your list is incomplete because it doesn't say that God is always good because you all know those things and not essentially but how you said this yourself.

but it's not about this and I think it's important because it has to do with whether his freedom is absolute God is always good and he's not free he's sometimes bad now this sounds like equivalent but if I recall there's a strand of Christian theology which says something like God has made wicked for his own purposes and that sounds to me like saying that God has made wickedness and so I think it has to be kind of a country can you knock this out oh sure there is a transition which I know I fudged a bit there and you picked up on Dr. Hill I'm sure but in God's in God's in God's perfect power and his perfect knowledge towards a creature there's some implication that it has to be it has to be that which is appropriate in such a relationship and I think there's some sort of transition from appropriate to good which I know

[ 57 : 49 ] I haven't spoken of here so I'm fudging the answer too I think the scripture by the way about it's speaking to the faithful in Israel and God is saying to them the God of Israel is saying to his people the wicked I have under my sovereign control I don't think there's any ontological bearing there but it might seem so that God created the God created what Paul calls the mystery of iniquity I

don't think we want to say that do we but I not that you want to say that I know but could could you say that go back to the heart of your question again I wish I could refer you want you want yeah they want goodness up here yeah well you see you've used it yourself because you said you've insisted on his absolute perfection and of course that's a limiting that limits what he can do yeah I was that's what he is

I would say is that a limit or is that a perfection I was I was thinking I was thinking of adding yet another bit to the preface and I'm going to run out of time that this is a kind of combination of the Greek philosophical some people who review Christian theology some Greek philosophical thinking has come into the church here by the church fathers and it's sort of it overlays lives with hopefully is under the authority of scripture and gets what is in error there gets corrected by scripture but so there are echoes here this could be almost the kind of neutral description of a divine being I know that doesn't bring in his moral character so I just fudge that here I know but I think there is some connection between an almighty one with a creature necessarily does that which is good for the creature but we can say no you bring that in arbitrarily

I'm not giving a very good answer to you but you where would you put in goodness up there I mean I just asserted the Christian tradition knows that the divine person is in fact a society of love but I know that's the assertion of Christian faith with revelation I mean this is not Zeus I don't think any Greek philosopher would ever call Zeus this oh please I mean the word that came to my mind as you were talking which was implicit in what you said was holy and I think that speaks to this point that God is holy we look at certain terms and attributes where we hear about God's wrath and in our thinking we think that's a bad thing and yet in God's holiness there isn't the element of badness in his wrath it's a holy wrath it's a good divine you used the word divine but I add the word holy there can't be any shadow of evil or badness in it yes doesn't

God demonstrate that through the life of Job and how he treated Job when you look at the whole story it's depicted there oh sure this tradition gets its thoughts about God from scripture the central Christian tradition so Job's part of that right my only question would be does your friend from hippo address the resurrected body at all as far as these attributes are concerned nothing that I'm aware of the eastern church does it most radically it addresses it says that we become deified in our resurrection nothing less than I don't know if all Christians are happy with that tradition seems to what happens to our creaturely status when we use such language such strong language did you brother did you well

Jesus as an artist paints the father as one who loves the sinner and the tax collector and welcomes them to his table and in eastern tradition eating with someone is totally accepted so yes yes so that's quite a picture oh sure it's it's I mean they lean heavy on the two Peter phrase participant in the divine nature I just I'm just I'm just I'll be happy to find out when I get my new body exactly what it all entails I'm sure it's all good it's just it's beyond I'm just waiting to find out then we can compare notes and who is closer to the truth now I'm just waiting as I get older I'm waiting more and more I know I mean

[ 63 : 43 ] I know I think in a catechism class maybe this language wouldn't be used but the language used implies this surely scripture has nothing to say against any of this I would argue there's nothing in scripture that challenges this I stand corrected on that question is this question of freedom and goodness and goodness God is intrinsically holy and good so because of that he just can't be he's free but he just can't be because his nature sucks that he's good and holy he still is free but that needs to be said that needs to be said absolutely good yeah

Augustine does I think I've got this guy in my head today don't I Augustine says and I think he's thinking eschatologically he's thinking about the perfect future Augustine says the perfection of freedom is the inability to commit sin that is perfect freedom not have the ability to be perfected in love I think Augustine surely that's correct when you're perfected in love you cannot do that which is evil and you're perfectly free to have the freedom to do an evil thing is what our creator warned Adam and Eve not to enter into that state Karl Barth humorously says that in the garden I think it's funny at least the evil one says to Adam and Eve why don't you become ethicists and start pondering what is the good and what is the evil which is a status which they should not have taken down upon themselves and in doing so they sinned in innocence you just do the good what we call freedom is actually a sign of our sinfulness

I have the freedom to try and shoot you today but that's evil it would be better if I didn't have the ability to do that I just loved you perfectly so the perfection of freedom is the inability to commit God

cannot do evil he's an infinite society of love he couldn't do evil that's his freedom does that resonate or is that no but I think none of those thoughts could come to the Greeks I'm tempted to say it couldn't come to any philosophical tradition that's all in the light of the mystery of Jesus and Israel and Jesus they're thinking in the light of the gospel and it produces this tradition of thought about God Bill sir would you say that the last heading you have there

I'm not sure whether to call it an attribute but necessary leads to the God that God is a God that's known doesn't necessarily address that I think you think your talk can lead us back to our bookcases to get out Jim Packer's book knowing God is one of the keys to the whole thing the whole plan do you think the word necessary covers that in that group well maybe I don't know if this answers your question directly

I'm helped by someone like Tom Wright in another context here who in his biblical scholarship will frequently all the way through the text the word God is spelled with a small g because he wants the reader to see he believes this is true obviously maybe it's not I think it is he wants the reader to see that when you when you when you ponder at one level the New Testament say all of scripture especially the New Testament ultimately what's in dispute is what the word God means in other words the fancy way of saying that is the word God is not univocal Muslims use the word Christians Jews everybody and in common parlance especially say Globe and Mail editorials everybody believes in God the Christian needs to say but we mean by the word God Jesus Muslims don't [69:17] Jews don't no the word God Christians have to get a grip on what we mean by the word God see if I pick up Jim Packer's book and I think you would agree with this knowing God oh great the readers subtly we all come to it subtly thinking that we know what the word God means in some measure and maybe it's all garbage this tradition tries to be a garbage removal system God is divine he has all power he has all knowledge he is perfectly free he is necessarily there in a lot of our common speech about God you would almost think that God some Christians casually talk about God we all don't it's not being judgmental it's almost if they're talking about Zeus the biggest one of them all who can throw around a lot of power he happens to be the God who wins all the bad that's not that's just so inadequate our God our God is more mysterious than that he's infinite please for what it's worth

I was taught that God is good the word God comes from the word good now I can't read in English but you know in the Bible we don't think I'd say would you agree with this in most of human history human beings have thought when they thought about God at all it was terrifying most pagan religions they had the word God in their vocabulary it was terrifying and just horrible horrible horrible so it's because we live in a society that has heard the gospel that we habitually think that God is good that God is love unbelievers who are thoughtful think this guy the idea that God is love is ridiculous it's the most absurd I believe that Christians hold that's a back to a classic if God is love then why do children die of cancer so you're an idiot to believe that God is love so Christians shouldn't talk casually about that it's in the mystery of Jesus we come to the belief that God is love you know it's not an easy it's not an easy belief that God is love or God is good

I like to think that in fact that I was taught that God is good that that's why the word is called God oh no no it's well okay I hear you I hear you saying we hear about God in the Christian tradition you know this is to get away from the idea that God is terrible that's right that's right but I wonder one other thing why did you use the word or the term there divine person as opposed to a divine being because person is limiting I don't think no I like the word person more than being I think scripture for instance talks about God's personhood all the time rarely but merely his existence presence that's why the Puritans thought that the Old Testament is painfully anthropomorphic Lord turn your ears to me see me with your eyes he's always smelling things that's an anticipation of God is intensely personal and he actually took on a body in the incarnation they thought it was an anticipation of that I'm just wary of the being I don't like the word being I don't have a grip on it I like the philosopher an atheist who said that all of western philosophy is a misunderstanding of the verb to be I like that AJ Ayer the logical positivist that's a cute little one liner isn't it the divine society yeah which is what we really think about God I think well I'm happy that I've cleared everything up here today Harry before you go this dreadful story of Trenton Colonel who has almost all the virtues of God and at the center of his life he's discovered this huge moral failure and that contradiction and does that exist for us all or is what do we do with that because it's just so so terrible and yet it's a picture of the contradiction that the heart of humanity is you know is the sort of image of

God picture of a human being and the terrible moral failure center of that living in one person it's how do you quote is that all Augustine says when you get to the center I mean Aquinas says you get to the center of evil you'd find nothing he thought it was nothing that's how infinitely difficult it is to understand evil what's at the center of a man who just murders the best answer to that great theologian was well there's just nothing there just the mystery of the emptiness of evil the insanity of it I guess he means by that the angelic doctor that's all I can say I think your question is a reflection of his answer which is just we're confronted with the insanity mystery of iniquity right the back there [ 75 : 41 ] I was just going to say it makes me think the word idolatry comes to mind we build people up as small key gods and in fact I would say to pass in there and it's partly our failure to deceive ourselves more valuable than me I have I'm a diligent that thank you yes the witching hour in this room is 20 minutes after 10 so you just seem to be getting steam here so I'm sinning I'm sure I'm sinning are you saying thank you Holly thank you very much so I haven't seen I