

The One True God (2LCF 2.1a)

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[0:00] So in our series, topical series in evening services, we've come to chapter 2 in our confession which speaks of God and the Holy Trinity.

! So we are going to see what Scripture has to say about God, about the doctrine of God. And so I want to ask a couple of questions before we do. And the first one is, is all this doctrine of God stuff really necessary?

Is this the kind of thing that's only important for theologians and for seminary students? Or is it important for everybody? At some churches, some people at those churches might make an assertion, it's a false assertion, and really what they're doing is they're creating a false dichotomy that doesn't exist and trying to pit two things against the other.

But these two things aren't a dichotomy, you actually can't have one without the other. And this question is this, well, the statement is that some will falsely assert that they're not so much about theology, they're more about worship.

So is this dichotomy true? And I'm going to assert that you can't have one without the other. And here's why. What would you call an erroneous formulation of deity?

[1:21] A perception of God that's wrong. What would you call that? You call it idolatry. An erroneous formulation of deity is idolatry.

So in other words, a wrongly perceived God is an idol. So if you get God heretically wrong, then what you are worshipping, whatever you are worshipping is not God, and your worship then is sin. So that statement that some might say, and it almost sounds humble at first, where they say that they're not so much about theology, they're more about the worship, is quite problematic.

Because if you get theology wrong, if you get the doctrine of God wrong, then your worship isn't of the one true living God, but probably of their own will.

They're worshipping their own will. And our confession in chapter 2, as it summarizes, concisely summarizes what we believe scripture says about God, there's three paragraphs in the last sentence of the last paragraph.

[2:27] I really like how it's worded. So I'm going to start with that, even though we're not getting that far. We're just starting with really the first couple of lines of the first paragraph. But the last statement of paragraph 3 says this, Which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God and comfortable dependence on Him?

So if you think communion with God is important, and our comfortable dependence on God is important, and to not commit adultery, then I would assert that theology proper, the doctrine of God, is important.

So, a couple questions, and this may be very well the most theologically technical term you've ever heard, but the question I want you to ask is this, what is God's whatness?

What is God? What makes God God? Now some might say, when you try to talk about God, about His perfections, or His excellencies, or His essence, they might kind of back away and say, oh, I don't want to put God in a box by stating something about God.

And again, it might sound humble at first, or that they're trying to exalt God by not wanting to confine Him. I don't want to be put in a box. I'm sure God doesn't want to be put in a box. But what they're doing, what they're trying to argue, is actually to argue against theology.

[3:52] And when you think about the Old Testament, and with the temple that Solomon built, what was the measurements of the Holy of Holies of the temple on an elevated temple?

It was a cube. In other words, it was a box. It was a big box on a big hill, and the glory of God filled the temple. Now we don't have an actual physical temple, and we don't have smoke fill the church, or glitter come out of the ductworks, or the fog machines queue up.

But God is pleased to fill, not in a fullness, but to fill His temple, which is a box. And how we understand that glory now is not by visible smoke, but by the Word of God. So I would like to begin by reading Isaiah 40, 18 to 31.

To whom, then, will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? The human molds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains.

[5:07] Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

He brings the princes to nothing. He makes the judges of the earth useless. Scarcely shall they be planted. Scarcely shall they be sown. Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth.

When He will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. To whom then will you liken me? Or to whom shall I be equal? Says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things. Who brings out their host by number, He calls them all by name. By the greatness of His might, and the strength of His power, not one is missing.

[6:27] Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel? My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might, He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.

But those who wait on 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.

Our great God, we thank You for Your Word, that You, whose greatness is incomprehensible, and even our greatest thoughts are not great enough for who You are.

Lord, we thank You that You have revealed Yourself to us, and though we cannot relate to You, we can indeed account for who You are, and that we can apprehend You.

[7:32] And I pray, Lord, that as we seek to do so this evening, of Your essence, that You would cause us to be in awe, and that we would wonder at Your majesty and glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, as we dive into the doctrine of God to understand His essence, I want to demonstrate that our knowledge of God's essence, or to put it another way, of God's whatness, is foundational for true worship.

So really, in response to that statement of not being so much about theology, but more about worship, I don't think that can be an accurate statement, but rather our knowledge of God's essence is foundational for true worship.

And again, what's another word for essence? It's whatness. What makes God, God. So first of all, let's actually refer to the confession of how they summarize God's essence, of what Scripture says about God's essence.

The Lord our God, so this is chapter 2, paragraph 1. The Lord our God is but one only living and true God, whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself.

[8:53] And that's what we will consider for this morning, or this evening. And as we go through it, and as I've read in Isaiah 40, there are probably going to be times where you just think, I can't wrap my mind around this.

And that's exactly the point. If that's what you're trying to do, you're not going to be able to, because we can't relate to God. We are not God. We are not the divine essence that we can relate to God.

So to a degree, there is mystery. But even though God is a mystery because we can't relate to Him, He has revealed Himself to us that we may know about Him and about His essence.

So, what can we learn about His essence? First of all, there is one God. Deuteronomy 6.4 says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Which means that God is numerically one. And this is where we start, right away we get into a mystery, because, well, we know that God subsists as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. [9:55] So how can there be one God subsisting in three persons? I just can't relate to it. I don't do that. I don't know anybody else that does it. So we can't comprehend what is mystery to us, but God has revealed this to us so that we may know Him.

So God's essence is one. There is one God. So we don't believe in tritheism. We don't believe that there are three gods, that the Father is a God, the Son is a God, and that the Holy Spirit is a God. But it is one essence. So whatever scripture says about that one essence of God applies to all persons of the God, undivided.

So numerically God is one. And the light of nature teaches us this. By nature, by the light of nature, by being made in the image of God, and as well as looking at creation, we know that there is one God who created all things, and that there cannot be more than one God.

And Robert Shaw, who wrote an exposition on the Westminster Confession of Faith, from which we get chapter two here, he words it very well. He said, There can be but one first cause.

[11:10] So actually I'll explain that a little bit. And we'll get to that later too. But if you examine something by its effects to understand its causes, every effect has a cause.

So what we see is an effect. What has caused that effect? Well then, when you look at that cause, well what caused that cause? And when you work out to the cause of each thing, you eventually work back to God.

And there's nothing that caused God. So God is uncaused, and God is the first cause. That's what he's meaning here. There can be but one first cause, one self-existent, independent, omnipotent, infinite, and supreme being.

It is a contradiction to suppose otherwise. So this kind of answers the question that tends to come up as well, where did God come from? Because we think about the effects. Where did I come from? I came from somewhere. What cause affected me to be? And then we think about God. When we keep working back, everything has a cause. So what caused God? So understanding his essence helps us understand that nothing caused God, but he's self-existent, and self-sufficient, and independent, and the source of all life.

[12:19] which brings us to the next part of the statement, which says, only living and true God. In 1 Corinthians 8, 4, it says, and we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.

So there is only one God. And when we think of idols, the first thing that probably comes to our mind is fashioning an image, like we read in Isaiah 40, or we might think of the golden calf, that they threw their gold into the fire and apparently out popped this golden calf.

There's an idol. But idols are also things in our hearts, or internally, that aren't a carved image, in which we see as the chief end, or the highest good.

So everything that's not God is a false God. It's an idol. Everything that is an idol is a false God. It's not the one living and true God.

And they're lifeless. Lifeless in comparison to God who is living. The only living God, which is in contrast to the lifeless idols destitute of life.

[13:29] And we're going to come back to living and God being the source of all life. But he's also spirit. And while we don't come to that word until later on, it's important to understand when we think about his essence.

Because as creatures who have bodies, we tend to take our experiences as creatures with bodies and think of God and just assume that he has a body or he experienced things as a creature does with the body.

But God is spirit, which means he's incorporeal. He's immaterial, he's invisible, and he's immortal. So that's something we have to grasp as we think about his essence, that he does not have a body. He's immaterial. He's spirit. And then, just to grasp it now, is that you might be thinking of verses in the Bible that speak of God, of his strong right arm, or things to that effect, or even about emotions that a person with a body, a creature would have.

And I was joking before about the most technical theological term. This is a little bit more of a technical term, but it's what's called anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms.

[14:46] in that words are used not about the very essence of God, but in how God relates to creatures. And because we can't understand, our comprehension can't grasp how, who God is,

language is used to accommodate our creaturely understanding.

So these anthropomorphisms means according to the manner of man. And sometimes it's not a man. for example, when it talks about under the shadow of his wing, that doesn't mean that God has feathers and wings that are spread out and it causes a shadow over us, but it's metaphorical. And when words are used to accommodate us so that we can have a bit of an understanding of how God interact, his operations with us as creatures.

God is the only living and true God and his subsistence is in and of himself. So again, the question, well, where did God come from?

If I came from a cause and that cause came from a cause and all that traces back to God as the first cause, where did God come from? God's subsistence is in and of himself.

[16:07] And the word that we use for this is called the aseity of God. That he is absolutely self-existent, self-sufficient, and independent.

His existence does not depend on anything or anybody else. He is self-existent, self-sufficient, and he does not depend on anything that he has created.

He is the source and fountainhead of all life, all glory, and all blessedness, which means he doesn't need his creatures. So he doesn't need his creatures for life.

He doesn't need creatures for his life. He doesn't need his creatures for his glory, and he doesn't need his creatures for his blessedness. He is in and of himself the fountainhead of all life, glory, and blessedness.

And this is the God that we serve. And from him, Romans 11, 36, from him and through him and to him are all things. All things that exist come from him, they're through him, and they're to him as the chief end.

[17:09] Now I mentioned before that we'd come back to that whole effects and causes, but metaphysics is taking the effect and learning about causes, and when we trace every effect that we know back to the causes, you eventually have to come back down to a first cause.

And the first cause is God, and God is not caused, so he is the uncaused first cause, and his subsistence is in and of himself.

He's the first cause, chiefest being, the highest good, and the chief end. And Acts 17, 28, says, in him we live and move and have our being. You've probably heard that before.

But what's interesting is where it says we live and move, the word for move in the Greek, so the Greek verbs, it can be in the present, the middle, or sorry, the active, the middle, or the passive. Active is that the person is the one that's doing it. Passive is that it's being done to the person. So when it says move, it's actually in the passive.

[18:16] So what that means is in him we live and are being moved and have our being. In God, we are being moved. So God is also infinite and being and perfection.

Let's chew on this for a little bit. Jeremiah 23, 24 says, Do I not fill heaven and earth, says the Lord? Now remember how I mentioned we don't want to put God in a box, but what's the temple?

The temple was a big box on a big hill, and the glory of God filled this box. But even though the glory of God filled this box, this temple, it didn't contain God.

The temple is actually a microcosm, and it didn't contain God. All the heavens and the earth cannot contain God. Nothing can contain God. Even though his glory filled the temple, nothing can contain God.

Not even the heaven and the earth. God is boundless, unbounded, and limitless. A way that it's been worded throughout history is that he's simultaneously and the simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life, which is complete, perfect, and at once.

[19:32] So think of that at once. Boundless and complete life at once. While we understand his unboundedness, his infinite and being and perfection. So God is eternal and immense.

His eternity means that he's atemporal, timeless. He's without beginning and without end. And there's been a shift in theology proper lately, which whenever there's a change, it's typically not a good thing, where they're just seeing God's eternity as being without beginning and without end. So as far back as you go in history, there's God. As far as you go into the future, there's God. But that doesn't define properly what God's eternity is. Because God is not only from everlasting to everlasting, but God does not undergo succession, whereas we do.

And that's something that's very hard for us to grasp. That's hard for us to wrap our minds around. God's very essence fills all time with complete, perfect, simultaneous possession of boundless life

all at once.

If I, we're, we, right now, are in the present. This is now. Before the evening service, before we came to church, that's done.

[20:58] We can't go back there. We can't change that. We can't go back into that moment. It's forever out of our reach. It's happened. The end of the service, even though you may wish it was closer, it's not at hand.

And it's not accessible to us. We are in this moment right now. And this moment right now is actually a very small moment when you think about it. Right now, even the word now with three letters, when I say now, if you were to freeze time in the middle of the word and freeze it on the O, I've already pronounced the N and that's gone.

I can't change my pronunciation of it. My pronouncing of the W hasn't come yet. We're just even on the O to freeze time in the middle of now.

And as creatures, that's how we are with time. We're bound by time. And so we can't wrap our minds around anything other than that. But that's not the case with God. God hasn't lived a succession of nows from forever to forever.

God is without succession in that a thousand years ago and a thousand years in the future, which to us are completely inaccessible, is the same moment of now for God.

[22:05] He is eternal. His essence fails all time. Then there's the immensity or the omnipresence of God. So just as His essence fails all time, so also His essence fails all space.

Because God is without a body, we have bodies, and our bodies can only be in one space at a time. God is without a body, and He fills all space. Without body, without bounds, without limitations, His essence fills all space.

And some might ask the question, what was God doing before He created the world? Or, if God created the heavens and the earth, where was God before He created the heavens and the earth? But again, even asking that question assumes God to be a creature who undergoes the succession of time and is limited to a particular space of where God was before He created.

When you think about even the question of where, the idea of where, God created. or when God created. There was no when before God created.

[23:17] So it's not like the timeline just goes before the beginning and goes after, but God as one act, as one moment, as one fills all space and all time.

Because His existence is atemporal. He exists in a boundless now, without beginning, without end, without succession, He fills all space and time in a boundless state of now, at once, existing as pure acts.

And maybe at this point, you might be thinking, I just can't wrap my mind around it. And that's exactly the point. We're not supposed to be able to get everything about God. And that's what just causes our minds to be blown, and that we can just be in awe and wonder at God, at His glory and His majesty.

We can't wrap our minds around God. Which is why we have the statement, His essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself.

God's essence can't be comprehended, but yet we still sometimes try, or we try to explain it in a way as though the person can comprehend it. God. And inevitably, at some point in time, somebody tells a bad analogy about God.

[24:42] Trying to give an analogy of how to understand that God is one in essence, but three in persons, but the problem is that an analogy uses something that's not God, and there's nothing that can relate to what God is.

There is nothing like God. So it actually turns out to be an analogy of heresy, because there's nothing like God. and nothing to relate him to. Psalm 145, 3 says, Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

So this is speaking of God's incomprehensibility. If we are able to fully comprehend something, we are superior to it.

To be able to comprehend something is to be better than it. to be able to fully wrap our minds around it. To comprehend something, so apprehend and comprehend are two things. To apprehend is to I've apprehended the pulpit, I've laid hold of it.

To comprehend is to be able to fully encompass it. Like something that's fully in your hands, on all sides, you've comprehended it. Our minds can't wrap themselves completely around God, but we

can lay hold of God according to how he has revealed himself.

[26:00] So if you're saying, but I just can't wrap my mind around it, it's good. it's good that you can't wrap your mind around it, because that means that God is greater than you, and you don't want to be greater than God.

God is unfathomable. If you remember in Acts 27 we were reading, when the ship would take soundings, and when they were taking the soundings, they kept finding that the bottom was coming up, so they knew that there was going to be a reef ahead.

But these soundings is taking the depth, but God is unfathomable, which means we can't find the depth of God.

And it's not that we don't have the instruments, or if with the ship, when they're taking soundings and dropping, let's say it's a line with lead on it, rope, to find the bottom of the ocean, it's coming up. With God being unfathomable, it's not that we don't have enough rope to find the bottom of God, it's to measure the depths of them rather, it's that the depths have no bottom of who God is.

[27:08] So, in summary of God's essence, the Baptist Catechism asks the question, what is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

So, what are some concluding uses that we can take out of our understanding of the essence of God according to how he has revealed himself to us.

First of all, we are creatures, God is creator, and God has sovereign right and propriety over all creation, which owes its existence to God as its first cause and chief end.

God is our first cause and our chief end of our existence. So, we owe God our adoration and worship by right of creation. All creatures being God's creation, owe God adoration and worship. But, sinful mankind does not give God the adoration and worship which is due to him. We do not adore him and we do not worship God by the light of nature, which then necessitates the gospel.

[28:23] And the spirit's effectual calling, in order for the sinner to be dislodged, uprooted, relocated, and reoriented toward God. So, back to God being sovereign, having sovereign right, propriety over creation.

We need to get the creator creature distinction because that's where a lot of issues come up is as creatures, we take what we experience as creatures and predicate that onto God and God must then function this way.

But God is not a creature, God is the creator. So, we must understand that distinction and unhitch creaturehood from God, which, here's another technical term, God is, really, other than.

God is other than creatures. creatures. He transcends our ability to comprehend and his very greatness exceeds our greatest thoughts.

His greatness is greater than our greatest thoughts. And the doctrine of God, which those who say they're not so much about theology, about worship, the injury that they're causing to themselves here, the doctrine of God takes you beyond who you are as a creature and what you can relate to, and it blows your mind with the majesty of God.

[29:55] You cannot comprehend the fullness of God, but you can, according to divine revelation, account for him, apprehend him, and adore him.

And such knowledge of God does not render us speechless, but it renders us worshipful, and worship is due to him.

So again, our knowledge of God's essence, or God's whatness, what makes God God, is foundational for true worship.

Thank you.