

God Without Parts (2LCF 2.1b)

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Date: 09 August 2026

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[0:00] But this series and the evenings that we've been working through, it's been topical, and what drives the topic of the sermon is the doctrine as it's articulated in the confession of faith.

And that God is incomprehensible.

And these things are important to understand as we move forward. But when we consider that God is one, and when we try to understand that, to try to wrap our minds about God is one, it's important to remember that God is incomprehensible.

We won't be able to wrap our minds around God, and that's good because we're not superior to God. We're not better than God, that we can wrap our minds around who God is, and then once we've mastered God, then we can move on to the next topic.

But we cannot comprehend God, and we have to understand that as we continue on in our study of God, of the doctrine of God.

[1:18] But we can know God. Though we can't comprehend Him, we can know God, and in knowing God, we can marvel at who He is and adore Him.

And though God is incomprehensible, and we can't comprehend all that God is, we must be very careful in our understanding of God that we don't fancy God to be something that He's not.

And in the confession, after what we looked at last week in chapter 2, I'll actually read a part of it.

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.

A most pure spirit. And then what continues is, as I said, we have to be careful that while we can't comprehend God, we have to be careful that we don't try to fancy Him to be something that He's not.

So part of the understanding of the doctrine of God is what God is not. And there is a list of things in the confession. And perhaps at first, in your first reading of the confession, you might have read through it and gone to this part.

[2:35] Most pure spirit, invisible, here's what He is not. Without body, comma, parts, comma, or passions. And those, that's a very short statement that covers three things that are actually very deep truths, which are foundational to understanding who God is in order that we don't fancy Him to be something that He is not, namely a creature.

Our creaturely understanding, we may tend to predicate those things on God. But the fact that God is not these things helps us to understand God.

So we will focus this evening on those two words, without parts. And perhaps in the first reading, you saw without body, without parts, and your mind might have gone to, okay, so He doesn't have a body, so He obviously doesn't have body parts, and then moved on.

But it's comma, without body, comma, parts. We're speaking about two different things. Given that God is incomprehensible, we will look further in how we can better know God, marvel at God, and adore God, by seeing what God is not.

So if you'll turn with me in your copies of God's Word to Exodus 3, I will read verses 1 to 14. Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

[4:06] And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

Then Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn. So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses.

And he said, Here I am. Then he said, Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. Moreover, he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.

So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.

[5 : 25] Now, therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression from which the Egyptians oppressed them.

Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?

So he said, I will certainly be with you, and this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, then you shall serve God on this mountain.

Then Moses said to God, Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they say to me, What is his name?

What shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, I am who I am. And he said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I am has sent me to you.

[6 : 33] Now, if you'll quickly flip over to Romans 11, verse 36. Romans 11, verse 36.

For of him and through him and to him are all things to whom be glory forever. Amen. Our great God, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the Lord's Day. We thank you for the church and for the means of grace. We pray that you would attend the preaching this evening, that you would make your word effectual to all of the hearers.

I pray that you would illuminate your word and give us a true understanding. I pray that you would use even me this evening in the preaching of the word and that all who hear would be blessed and grow in knowledge for faith and obedience.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So our focus is going to be on those two words about God being without parts and understanding what God is not.

[7 : 42] And to summarize it in one sentence, and before I say it, I can't take credit. This is not my saying. That what this means is that all that is in God is God.

So this was first articulated by Augustine, but the phrase itself was coined by Aquinas, and it's been used quite frequently, especially by Puritans.

But all that is in God is God. So first, a quick examination of Exodus 3.14, the last verse, that God's essence is his existence.

And then second, we will look at Romans 11.36, that God is absolutely uncaused. And then third, the doctrine of divine simplicity.

And then the uses which we can draw from this for ourselves today. So first of all, Exodus 3.14. I started off by reading, sorry, Exodus 3.14. I started off by reading that.

[8 : 44] And what we'll learn from that is that God's essence, or we could say God's essence is his act of existence. That's a lot to try to wrap our heads around, but let me explain it.

So the question, if you notice, and as we read through it, Moses proposed the question of when they ask him, what is his name?

And when I was reading it, you might have thought, that's kind of a strange response. So he asked, what is his name? And the response was, I am who I am. I am has sent you. So imagine, if you will, that you ask me, do you have children?

And I answer by saying, a child is the posterity of two parents, one man and one woman. And you think, that's not what I asked. The question that I ask is, is there?

Whether there is children. And you describe for me what a child is. So then you say, well, I gather that you do have a child. Tell me about your child. Tell me what your child is like.

[9 : 49] And I answer by saying, I have a child. You're going to think, you answered a different category of what I was asking. It's confusing the two, because with us, with creatures, those are two different things.

Whereas with God, it's not so. So though that may be a strange response to us as creatures in our understanding of our existence, our essence, and our attributes, the question, what is his name? Now, in Hebrew, names represent something. In Hebrew, a name signifies the thing's nature, or it signifies the thing's essence.

So the name, I would say, what is the name? It's saying, what is the essence? What is the nature of this being? In Hebrew, the name signifies the nature of its being.

So the question that's being asked by saying, what is his name? The question is asking, what is God's whatness? This God, what is the whatness of God's nature?

[10 : 59] What is his essence? In other words, they're asking, why should we trust that he will do what he has said? That he will lead them from bondage in Egypt into this land of promise.

Why should we trust that? Why should we trust that he will do what he was said? And so to answer that, the question is, what is his name? In other words, who has sent you?

And why should we trust him? They're asking, what is the grounds for their trust? Because the grounds of their trust is rooted in the matter of his name. The name represents the nature of his being.

And what's the answer that's given? So the question really is, what is the whatness of the one who is saying this? And why should we trust him based on his essence, his nature?

And the answer is, I am who I am. And he says, I am has sent you. So the answer to the question, what is his name? What is his nature? What is his essence?

[12 : 03] Why should we trust him? I am. So when we even understand further that in Hebrew, the name signifies nature. Why should we trust him?

What's his nature? I am. It still might seem a little bit strange to us that that is the answer. But I am, again, not to get into the weeds of grammar so soon in a sermon, but am is the verb to be.

To say I am is the first person use of the verb to be. And in this case, it's not past tense. It's unbound. I am.

It's not I was. I am. It's unbound. There's no beginning or end. It's just a continuing ongoing thing. I am. It's the unbound first person use of the verb to be.

God is an unbound being who is his own existence. His unbound existence, God's existence knows no state of past or present or future, but is a boundless present.

[13 : 14] So what the reply is saying when they said, what is his name? What is his essence?

What is his whatness? What is his nature? Why should we trust him? The reply is saying that God's being is his essence and will not change.

So next God's attributes are the same as his essence, which is the same as his existence, which is why we can't ask the same question about creatures.

Whereas with God, it works. What is his name? What is his nature? I am. With human attributes. Human attributes are predicated in a composite way.

This is not so with God. Again, to hear that. What exactly does that mean? So if a human is just that that person has a high view of justice, justice seems to be something we could say about that human.

If a human is just, but then something happens in that human's life and justice is subtracted from that person, that human is still a human being.

[14 : 23] It's not the essence that is just justice that the essence is taken away. It's an attribute and human attributes are predicated in a composite way.

So it's still a human should justice be subtracted from that person. This is not so with God. God is not only just. God is justice. And we can't take justice away from God.

It's not that justice is something that God is outside of himself. He sourced it to himself and he now possesses it. He now has justice, but God is justice. So we can't actually take justice away from God.

But hypothetically, on paper, if you try to do so on paper in a theoretical way, remove, take away or subtract justice from God, then the result that you have on paper is no longer God.

So God is not only just, he is justice. Likewise, with power, God is not only all-powerful, but God is omnipotence itself.

[15 : 27] Omnipotence is almighty. You cannot subtract what is God from God. You can't subtract God from God.

So this phrase, these two words, God without parts, tells us that God's attributes are identical with his essence. His attributes is the same as his essence.

And this prevents us from saying things such as God has justice, that he possesses it, he's possessed it to himself. Or that, I can't say that God has justice or God has goodness or God has power or God has life, as though he's possessing something that is other than God.

As though justice is something other than God, but he has it to himself. Or life or goodness or power is something other than God, but he has it, he possesses it.

Rather, God without parts subsequently insists that God is justice, God is goodness, God is power, and God is life.

[16 : 33] He is eternally self-existent and he is the fountainhead of all justice. God is self-existent and he is eternally the fountainhead of all goodness.

He is the fountainhead of all power and he is the fountainhead of all life. So God does not just live. God is life itself.

He is absolute and being life himself, he does not depend on anything for his life. So with all that we can say about God, all of his attributes, God is power, almighty, omnipotent, and God does not depend on anything outside of himself for his power.

God is goodness. He doesn't depend on anything for his goodness and so forth. God is the uncaused first and chiefest being and all composites.

So when I say composites, it means something that's composed of parts. A bunch of parts that have been brought together. That's a composite. So take, for example, baseball bat.

[17 : 35] Maybe you've heard of a composite baseball bat. It's a bunch of carbon fibers that have been glued together into a form. It's a whole bunch of different things that have been brought and held together. That's a composite bat.

The alternative would be, for example, a wooden bat. A wooden bat is just one piece. It's not multiple things that have been brought together and held together.

So understand composite. So all composites are subsequent to their parts. For something to be many parts brought together, the whole of them being brought together is subsequent to the parts themselves.

To make a composite bat, you have to have the parts that are separate and then brought together. So, for example, an assembly line. A whole bunch of parts are made on the assembly line. Let's take a snowmobile.

When there's a snowmobile that exists, it's not like there's just a crack in the universe and now there's a snowmobile and there wasn't a snowmobile before. There's an assembly line. Parts are made. All the parts are made. They're then assembled together.

[18 : 38] So the parts come first and then the assembly and then the whole. So parts, sorry, a composite is subsequent to the parts.

And a composite must have a cause to compose its parts. God is not composite. That is, God has no cause. God has not composed a part, something outside of God composed them together in order for there to be God.

Now, in Romans 11, 36, we see that God is absolutely uncaused. If you're still there, notice that it says, For of him and through him and to him are all things.

Of him, through him, and to him. Of him, God is the first efficient cause of all things. Everything that exists that is not God is of God. All things are of God.

God is the first cause of all things. Through him, everything, all things that are made are made through God. God is the formal governing cause of all things. And then to him, all things that are made, all of creation is to God.

[19 : 58] God is the final cause and the chief end of all things. And all things to be ordered back to him as the chief end and highest good. And notice that there's no caveat in this text.

There's no additional clause. There's no prior causation to God where it's of him and through him and to him are all things except for that thing that caused God to be.

Everything is of God, through God, and to God. God is not subject to any causality whatsoever.

That which is the reason for everything else cannot have reason for himself.

Metaphysics is taking the effects to find out the cause. And then what caused that and what caused that. And there's a reason for whatever there is the effect. There's a reason for that and that's that which caused it.

And when you trace that all the way back, you get to God. But there's nothing that caused God. There's not a reason for God. And this is an important thing to grasp as we move forward because we as creatures have a tendency to take our creaturely limitations and predicate that on God because that's the way that I'm something causes me.

[21:14] And there is a reason for why I exist or there's a reason for why I acted the way I did or there's a reason for why I changed and God must be the same way.

But to put it in other words, being uncaused, that God is uncaused, God does not receive his being from another. He simply is.

God is. So the doctrine of divine simplicity. The words without parts, what that's getting at is the doctrine of divine simplicity.

We cannot conceive of God as he is. So he reveals himself to us in parts. He reveals himself to us bit by bit in ways that we can understand because we cannot comprehend God as he is.

In other words, God in his revelation is accommodating our creatureliness. He's accommodating our creaturely limitations. Augustine had a really good illustration of a prism.

[22:17] When light, pure white light hits a prism, there's a spectrum of color that comes out the other end. And God, who God is, is unapproachable light.

And so pure, we cannot comprehend. It's too much for us. So creation is like that prism. And we on this side of creation see the spectrum that comes out of that prism.

But that's not, that's not the white light. So on this side of creation, God reveals himself to us bit by bit or in parts, but only because that's the only way we can, we can understand it.

We cannot see God as he is and live, but yet he reveals himself to us in such a way that we can know him, that we can account for him, that we can know him, that we can marvel at him and that we can adore him.

So we cannot directly know the divine essence in a one-to-one way, like the light that goes into the prism, but it does further help us shape our understanding of God by considering God negatively, or in other words, how God is not, or what God is not.

[23:28] And that's what this portion is, that God is without parts. God is not composite. God is not composed of parts. So by removing the idea of composition, we come to divine simplicity.

And any composition of parts requires a cause, which we've gone over. God is the uncaused first cause. God is not composite.

So you might be thinking, but I've never heard of this before. I've never heard of God without parts before. I've never heard of divine simplicity before.

I've never heard this doctrine explained before. So why is it so important that it's in the confession? But also, if it's so important, why in the confession does it only receive two words if it's so important and foundational?

And the reason why is because when, well, our confession was framed in 1677, but this part of it was taken from the Westminster Assembly, which was also in the 1600s.

[24:33] So in the 17th century, from the early church all the way to the 1600s, everybody just knew that it was important and foundational.

It was never challenged. It was just understood. And in the Belgic confession of, in the 1500s, it's the first thing that's mentioned in the Belgic confession, God's simplicity.

So if it was so important, so foundational and so well known, why is it not talked about very much today? Why is this such, seems such a new thing?

And it's as a result of the Enlightenment period, or the Enlightenment period, wanting to do away with everything, tradition and everything that was previously known.

And then following the Enlightenment period, the ecumenical movement, where they wanted to do away with doctrine because doctrine divides.

[25:35] And the ecumenical movement is that they wanted to be as broad and inclusive as possible. Doctrine divides. So they just pushed away doctrine.

But yet this is an important and foundational doctrine. In God without parts, there is no composition in God, neither physically nor metaphysically.

So we see God is without body, comma, parts. Our mind might instantly say, okay, well, he's without body parts. He's without a body, so naturally he's without body parts. But it's comma, it's two separate things that's being addressed.

Not just physically, not material parts, but metaphysically, God is not composed of parts. And that his attributes is identical to his essence.

So to get back to that earlier question of what is his name, what is his nature, what is his essence? Like that question, if you were to say, tell me about your child, what's he like?

[26 : 38] And I say, I have a child. Or to say it the other way, do you have a child? Or no, if you ask, what is, sorry, do you have a child?

And I respond by saying, what a child is with God. These are not two different things. They are the same thing. His essence and his existence, his attributes are the same thing.

There's no composition of God. He's without parts, physically and metaphysically. God is not the result of composition. So what exactly is a part?

It's easy to think of what it is materially, like the composite bat. But what about metaphysically?

What is a part? The part, something that is a part, is not the fullness of the whole.

At the same time, the whole is not its fullness without its part. If I said to you, I bought a new set of wheels today for \$10,000. You could take it two ways.

[27 : 41] You could either say, you spent \$10,000 for four tires. And that is a part. The tires are a part. But what I'm getting at when I say a set of wheels, I'm talking about the car.

So I'm talking about the whole. The tires themselves is not a whole car. If you take tires off the car, it doesn't function as a car. It's not a car. So also, the car itself, if you take the tires off the car, the car is not the whole.

It can't function as a car as its whole. So part is not the fullness of the whole, and the whole is not its fullness without its part. And this is important to understand because God is one.

And then as we move forward after the attributes of God into the triunity of God and the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we don't want to predicate this idea that God is, well, the Father is a part of God.

The Son is a part of God. The Spirit is a part of God. As though each person of the Trinity is not the whole of divine essence. And so also with God's attributes, when we think of the justice of God.

[28 : 48] As though it is a part of God, a part which can be removed. And if it can be removed, then the whole doesn't function as the whole. It's not the fullness of the whole without it.

So whether it be the persons or whether it be the attributes, and this is something that the more we understand it, the more truly marvelous and beautiful God becomes.

And this doctrine of God, all of the doctrine of God, you might have noticed that we're slowly taking our time through it. For example, this evening's sermon is based on two words.

The doctrine of God is very important. And as it concludes by saying, the doctrine of God and of the Trinity is the very foundation of our communion with God and our comfortable dependence upon him.

And the more that we understand who God is, we truly do marvel and adore God for who he is. So God is not the result of a composition. Something that is infinite would have to be, would have to compose the parts, and the parts would not then be infinite.

[29 : 53] If you follow me. So parts cannot be infinite if they're composed, and whatever composes them has to be infinite. So if God was composed of parts, he wouldn't be infinite, and something infinite would have to compose him.

Such a conclusion of movement in God destroys the definition of God as absolute being. And the result is not God as he truly is. So any part that is not uncaused, indivisible, divine nature is not divine.

And its essence, or nature, therefore, is not divinity. That is to say, it's not God. So what are some concluding uses that we can take from this?

Why does this matter for me today? You might be asking. It seems like a lot. Why does this matter for me today, as a churchgoer?

Well, Exodus 3.14, it gets to the issue of why the people whom God calls out of bondage should trust him. In Exodus 3.14, God is going to redeem his people, deliver them from bondage, uproot them from Egypt, take them, lead them through the wilderness wandering, transfer them into a promised land of rest.

[31 : 15] And it's getting to the point of why, the point of it all is why the people should trust him. So the essence of this doctrine gets to the heart of why the people of God should trust him.

And the Exodus in the Old Testament is a type that points towards another Exodus. An Exodus where God redeems his people from the bondage and slavery of sin, uproots them out of Egypt, out of this world, leads them through the wilderness wandering as pilgrims, and safely into the land of promise.

So, all who are in this world, or all pilgrims, must ask the question, Who is this? What is his essence? What is his nature? That I should trust him that he will do what he has promised. And with this second Exodus, or this greater Exodus, we see it's not Moses that leads the people. Moses is a type of Christ that points to Christ.

And this is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and his incarnation, his living, his suffering, and his dying as a substitute to satisfy divine justice.

[32 : 34] And we think about that, and about how God's attributes are his essence. God is just. It's not that God takes justice, and now he has justice, but God is justice.

And you can't take justice away from God, because God is justice. He's the fountainhead of all justice. Because God is holy, righteous, and just, all sin must be punished.

So how can we, who are sinners, be right before God, when God, you can't remove justice from God. And that's why it's important to understand, because God doesn't set aside his justice.

He doesn't become unjust for our sake. That in the cross, what's going on at the cross, is we see God's justice. We also see God's grace. We also see God's mercy. We see all of God's attributes. We see who God is on display for us as creatures. Because God's justice isn't set aside. He doesn't decrease or corrupt his justice, but his justice is fully satisfied on Christ as a substitute for the sins of his people.

[33 : 40] So that forgiveness of sins and that righteousness of Christ that is accredited to us, how do we, being those who are in bondage to slavery and sin and the misery of sin, how do we be like the Israelites who are uprooted out of that, transferred and relocated into a different kingdom.

And the Bible says that we are to receive Christ, to trust Christ, that he will do what he says and that we are forgiven and that Christ did satisfy divine justice and God is who he is.

And the heart of the issue, which is what they said, who is this that we should trust him? It's that we look at who God is, what he has done, what he has promised, and we do trust him and we do embrace these promises and we do receive them for ourselves, trusting in Jesus Christ that he will indeed deliver us from, redeem us from bondage and slavery to sin, lead us through this wilderness and safely into the promised rest.

So why does this matter for me today? It gets to the issue of why the people whom God calls out of bondage should trust him and his response is, I am who I am.

Why should I trust God that he will do what he has promised? I am who I am. John Gill on this, he wrote, it denotes his eternity and immutability and his constancy and faithfulness in fulfilling his promises.

[35 : 13] For it includes all time past, present, and to come. And the sense is, not only I am what I am at present, but I am what I have been and I am what I shall be and shall be what I am.

So the essence of this is that God is the God who redeems his people from bondage. He leads them through the wilderness and safely into the promised rest.

So to ask the question of what does this matter for me today, ask the question, can you trust him? Who is this?

Can I trust him? Which is asking the question, what is his name? What is his nature? What is his whatness? What is his essence? That is to ask, what is the nature of God?

What is his essence? And the answer is that God is. God's essence is uncaused, which means nothing can cause him to change.

[36 : 19] God's uncaused essence is pure actuality and he's not a composition of parts. So again, why is this important for me to know that God is without parts? Because of the fact that God is without parts, God can't fall apart.

That's to say that his attributes cannot be separated from his essence, neither in full nor in part. He is. God is. All that is in God is God.

God is perfect. God is absolute. And God does not depend on anything outside his essence to do for his people what he has said he will do.

So what we learn from this, from divine simplicity, that God is without parts, that God is uncaused, that God is, is that God will do for his people what he has said he will do.