

One God with Many Attributes

Dt 6:1-5; Rm 1:18-23; BCF Art 1

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 29 August 2021, 16:30

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

- Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- Two Bible Psalms – Ps 14 and Ps 53 – start with these words: *“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”*¹
- In other words, the one who claims that there is no God – that one is a fool!
- Well, in this category fall two groups of people: the atheists and the agnostics.
 - The **atheist** believes that there is no God!
 - And the **agnostic** – as the name says – believes that even if there is a God, we can have *no knowledge* (a-gnosis) of Him. Yes, the agnostic argues that, if there is a God somewhere out there, He is too powerful and faraway for humans to know Him or have a relationship with Him.
- Well, having heard again what the atheist & agnostic say, the question is: “What do they have in common?” “In what way are the atheist and the agnostic the same?”
- Well, does their similarity not lie in the fact that, for both, God is considered to be irrelevant to our daily practical living – there can be no contact between us and God?
- Well, this leads us to point 1 in the sermon...

An Inborn Sense of God

- Eccl 3:11 says *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*²
- In other words, although God is far too powerful & great for human beings to fully comprehend, He did set eternity in their

¹ אָמַר נָבֵל בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין אֱלֹהִים

² אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יְפֹה בְּעֵתוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר־
עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מִרֵאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף:

hearts – i.e., He did provide them with an inborn sense of things eternal and of God!

- Romans 1:20 is in sync with this, for it says, “***For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.***”³
- Wow! Gauging by these words, no-one can honestly say that God does not exist!
- Look, is this not also why John Calvin – no doubt on the strengths of these Bible passages – has written in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* about man’s “Sense of the Divine” (Latin: Sensus Divinitatis)?
- Says Calvin:
- “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of God. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the excuse of ignorance, God Himself has implanted in all human beings a certain understanding of his divine majesty. And, ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since, therefore, human beings, one and all, perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honour him and to consecrate their lives to his will... Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion, there lies in this fact a tacit confession of a sense of deity (of God) inscribed in the hearts of all.”⁴

³ So the NASB. Here is the NIV “***For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.***” The Greek says, τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ (invisible things of Him) ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἢ τε ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους,

⁴ My somewhat simplified & modernised version of the following words by Calvin: “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretence of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honour him and to consecrate their lives to his will... Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion, there lies in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all” (cf. among other <http://www.hollowayquarterly.com/2013/02/calvins-sensus-divinitatis.html>).

- That's Calvin's beautiful description of man's inborn "sense of the divine" – a sense which Calvin has also called, the "seed of religion" (Latin: Semen Religionis).
- Well, how ironic – how sad – that some people (i.e., atheists and agnostics), despite all the evidence, keep on kicking so hard against this truth!
- You see, an article in the Dominion Post of Saturday, 14th May, 2011 writes about this. The article's title is "Humans Hanker for God Concept."⁵
- This article explains how, by the initiative of the Centre for Anthropology and Mind at Oxford University, fifty seven researchers conducted studies in twenty countries across different cultures to find out whether man has an inborn sense of God or – as they phrased it – whether "the mind is open to supernatural agency."
- So, after NZ\$3.9 million and more than forty studies, what did these learned people find?
- Well, that without any doubt – as they phrased it – "there is an inbuilt bias in the mind towards seeing the world in religious or spiritual terms."
- In other words, these learned people have found out that, yes, indeed, man has an inborn sense of God and of life after death!
- But do you know what these learned people did with their findings?
- I have listened to one of them – a certain Professor in Psychology at Yale University who said in an interview on Radio New Zealand⁶ that this sense of God came about as an accident of evolution, and the fact that all people have this sense of God does not prove the existence of God!
- How painfully ironic and sad! Learned doctors and professors who have included little children in their studies – children 5 years and under – and have come to a clear & unequivocal result, choose to suppress, stifle, or reason away the existence of God!

⁵ This article's origin is from *The Times*.

⁶ Interview that Kathryn Ryan (Nine to Noon) had with Paul Bloom of Yale University, Connecticut on 4th March 2009. Recording of this interview in possession of Pieter van Huyssteen

- It reminds me of our Lord Jesus' words in Matthew 11 (v.25-26), "***I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.***"
- Ps 10 (v.4) also describes such people: "***In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'***"⁷
- May I remind you that the world is full of such people – in the secular, post-Christian West, as well as in hard-line communist countries!
- But, my brother & sister, the Bible is clear – yes, ironically even the research results of those hardened unbelieving Oxford scholars are clear – and you & I have experienced (and are experiencing) this truth: *God has indeed created us with a sure knowledge of Himself.*
- Everyone either suppresses this knowledge of God, or embraces it because of the grace of God through Jesus Christ working in him.
- Atheism and agnosticism are indeed *the products of the sinful thinking of men who know deep down that there is a God but refuse to worship Him.*⁸
- Well, based upon God's word (and talking of all Christians), the first words of Belgic Confession Art.1 say, "*We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there is one God...*"
- Yes, all who hold to this Confession, believe – just like its author Guido de Brès – in the God of the Bible.
- You see, there are many religions and a variety of so-called "gods," but only the Christian confesses God in the way He has revealed Himself in His Word.

- Well, that was point 1, "An Inborn Sense of God."

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ps 10:4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁸ I agree with Nymeyer, B.L. and Bezuyen, A. s.a. Faith of Our Fathers: studies in the Belgic Confession. Chino, CA : First United Reformed Church. p.13

- Here is point 2...

One True God

- The BCF Art.1 continues by saying about God that He is, “...*a simple and spiritual being...*”
- What does this mean? And on which Bible verses is this statement based?
- First of all, we must make clear that when the BCF Art.1 states that God is *a simple being*, it means that God cannot be divided up into different loose-standing parts, as if one part is just Father and another loose-standing part is just Son, and yet another loose-standing part is just Holy Spirit!
- Neither can we play God’s characteristics off against one another, e.g., His *love* against His *justice* against His *Holiness*.
- No, God is One.
- And, if you reflect upon this a bit more deeply, the claim which God is making to Israel in Dt 6:4 is very, very unique – the words that say, “***Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.***”
- We say (that) the fact that *God is One* is very unique and therefore quite significant!
- It’s all the more unique when you consider that all the nations around Ancient Israel worshiped many gods – they even worshiped created things like sun, moon and stars; like thunder, rain and fertility; or a god of war and a god of love!
- This is what the nations south of Ancient Israel – Egypt, Edom – did!
- Also the nations east of Ancient Israel – the Moabites and Ancient Arabs
- Also the nations west of Ancient Israel – the Philistines; and the nations north of Ancient Israel – the Canaanites and Phoenicians, the Syrians, the Babylonians and Assyrians, the Hittites, and even the Greeks and Romans!
- These nations all worshiped many Gods – they were all *polytheists*!

- There was not a single nation that was not a polytheistic nation!
- Then, suddenly, smack in the middle of all these polytheists, one nation – Israel – arose worshiping only one God, a God who revealed Himself by the Name Yahweh, i.e. “I am” a name which *reveals* Him and yet *hides* Him!
- And, isn’t it mind-bending, how Israel (living in the middle of a world of polytheists) heard from Him (from Yahweh) that He, their God, is One!?
- And, without having spaceships or space telescopes, this nation Israel knew that the lights up in the sky – the sun, moon and stars – were not gods (were not to be worshiped) – but that they were *created* things!
- How did Ancient Israel come to such an understanding?
- My brother & sister, because the same God who had made all the stars & planets, is also the One who told them, “*The Lord (Yahweh) your God, the Lord (Yahweh) is One.*” Yes, He the one and only true God, is also the One who told them in Dt 4:19 (just two chapters earlier), “*And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.*”⁹
- God – the only true God and Creator of all things – is one, or, as the BCF says, “...a simple being.”
- Which means that no-one should be a **polytheist** – worshiping many gods!
- But it also means that no-one should be a **pantheist**; yes, no-one should believe that *all things* are God!
- You see, according to pantheists, the rocks are god, the trees are god, the animals are god, and the waters are god, and god is in all!
- In a Bible college where I once taught, there was a young lady-student from China who explained the polytheistic background she grew up in.

⁹ Dt 4:19 וּפְנֵי-תֵשֶׁא עֵינֶיךָ הַשְׁמַיְמָה וְרָאִיתָ אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הַיָּרֵחַ וְאֶת-הַכּוֹכָבִים כֹּל צָבָא הַשְׁמַיִם וְנִדְחָתָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לָהֶם וְעַבַדְתָּם אֲשֶׁר חִלַּק יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֹתָם לְכָל-הָעַמִּים תַּחַת כָּל-הַשְׁמַיִם:

- She said her people believed that everything was god! It so confused her that she could hardly walk on their farm as she feared that she might step on an ant, and so squash god (or a small or larger part of god) under her feet!
- How sad that the New Age movement continues to spread this lie by teaching that all is god and that god is in all.
- Yes, the New Age belief is that every person, as part of god, is thought to be a god together with the whole universe.
- Now, the Christian should not think that Eph 4:6 supports pantheistic or New Age beliefs.
- Eph 4:6 says, “*(There is)...one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*”¹⁰
- Of course, the words “*through all and in all,*” don’t mean that all things *are* god, but only that God’s influence *affects* all things *created*!
- And when Col 1:17 says about Christ that “*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together*”¹¹ it does not say that all things *are* god; no, it merely emphasises again that all *created* things exist and are steered by the power of God through Jesus Christ!
- My brother & sister, based on Dt 6:4, the Christian confesses **monotheism** – i.e., the belief that there is only one God!
- This One and True God – unlike the gods of false religions – made and is still ruling the universe!
- And, as our Lord Jesus said (and the BCF Art.1 repeats) God is **spirit**!¹²
- Indeed, because you & I each have a *body*, we can only be in one place at one time.
- But God is not physically limited, which means that God has no physical body or any visible form which we can see with our eyes.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Eph 4:6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* (1984). (Col 1:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹² John 4:24, “*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*”

- For this reason, God does not allow us to represent Him by making images “...in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Ex 20:4).
- Yes, God who is present everywhere, does not permit us to limit Him by making pictures or carvings of Him.
- In fact, it is impossible to depict God! He is limitless!
- Thus, when we worship Him, we may not reduce the infinite God to a man-made image.
- Well, that was point 2 – One True God!
- Here is point 3...

God’s Attributes

- Much can indeed be said about God’s attributes (essential qualities) – full sermons can be written on each of God’s attributes.
- But because we want to cover all of BCF (Art.1) in one sermon, suffice to give only the following basic summary of God’s attributes.
- You see, now that the BCF (Art. 1) has confessed trust in the God of the Bible, it lists some attributes (essential qualities) of God – qualities of God which He has revealed to us.
- And we must understand that God’s attributes do not merely *describe* Him; no, His attributes *are* who He is.
- For example, God is not merely *described* as eternal or immutable/unchanging. Rather, He *is* eternal. He *is* immutable/unchanging!
- And if we lose sight of even one of these attributes, that will be to diminish God – or rather, to diminish our *knowledge* of Him!
- Now, if we have a closer look at God’s attributes, this basic – yet striking - thing: God’s attributes can be divided into two groups!
 - The first group describes God’s so-called “incommunicable” attributes, i.e., attributes which none of His creatures possess, e.g.,
 - God is eternal. In contrast, every creature on earth dies.

- Only God is infinite
 - Only God is all-powerful
- The second group describes God’s so-called “communicable” attributes, i.e., attributes that are found to some degree in mankind, e.g.,
 - wisdom
 - knowledge
 - Indeed, an older man/woman may be wise, but he/she can never have the perfect wisdom of God.
- Now, perhaps you ask, “But, pastor, what is so significant about the fact that some of God’s attributes are incommunicable and some are communicable?”
 - Well, do not God’s incommunicable attributes remind us that He is so much greater than us?¹³
 - And is it not so that His communicable attributes remind us that, apart from being infinitely greater than us, God is also close to us?
- My brother & sister, to conclude...
 - BCF (Art.1) draws your & my attention to God!
 - You see, many people in this world may read the Bible or this article and yet may never come to faith in God through Jesus Christ!
 - But, by grace through faith, we believe with our hearts and boldly confess with our mouths that...
 - There is a God!
 - That, although we cannot fully grasp God, He nevertheless tells us enough of (yet exactly/truthfully) who He is!

¹³ Or, to put it in theological terms, “His incommunicable attributes emphasise the absolute (free-from-limitation) Being of God” (cf. Berkhof, L. 1959. Systematic Theology. London : The Banner of Truth Trust. p.57f.).

- And, just like Genesis 1, the BCF (Art. 1) does not try to *prove* God's existence. No, the church accepts the truth of God's existence.
- Yes, we accept the fact that God does exist and He is who He says He is. This we know from a faith deeply rooted in God's Word!
- Besides, from God's works everywhere in creation, it is evident that He exists!
- And here's the reality: if one does not have the eyes of faith, no amount of evidence will convince him/her to acknowledge God. And, as said at the start of this sermon, we've seen this sad reality with those learned doctors and professors who have indeed discovered the truth through their research. Yet, they still refused to believe in God!
- The fact that Christians believe and confess God, is a gift from Him!
- Indeed, He works in His loved-ones' hearts by His Word & Spirit (See John 3 – Jesus' words to Nicodemus)!
- As your pastor, I pray that you have received (that all our children will receive) Jesus Christ, the expression of God's love, right here in your heart!

AMEN (2676 words excluding footnotes)