

“HOW DO WE KNOW GOD REALLY EXISTS?”

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Sermon Texts: Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:18-20

Introduction.

What do you believe? Why do you believe what you believe? If you were going to sit down and write a personal confession of faith, a statement of what you believe what would you write and where would you start?

Would you start like the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth”?

Would you start with questions like the Heidelberg Catechism, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?”

Or with a question like the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “What is the chief end of man?”

Would you start like the Second Helvetic Confession and the Westminster Confession with a statement concerning Holy Scripture and what is our authority for believing what we believe?

How would you begin? And by the way, I do think it would be an excellent exercise for your mind and soul if each of you wrote a personal statement of faith in your own words. Don't say all the good confessions have already been written, or that you would just copy from some other creed. Seminary students often have to write a lengthy Credo or statement of faith and they aren't allowed to plagiarize other sources. I encourage you to try it and then add to it as you grow in your understanding.

Do you know what you believe? Could you write a simple statement of what it means to be a Reformed Christian? Many of you have been members of a Christian Reformed Church all your life, can you articulate what we believe? Can you defend why it even matters?

Did you notice how the Belgic Confession begins? Did you notice what it says and what it doesn't say? Article One begins with an assumption. It states that there is a God, that there is only one God, that in His essence He is one single and simple spiritual being and that His name is God. Then it goes on to mention His *chief attributes* in two separate and distinct lists which we will consider next week.

The Belgic begins sort of like the way Scripture begins, with the grand statement, “In the beginning, God.”

All creeds and confessions assume that God exists. Why is that? Why don't they give detailed proof about the existence of God?

Through the centuries great minds have developed some classic proofs for the existence of God.

There is an argument from existence, from cause and effect (cosmological argument).

We can look at creation and see the evidence of a creator, just as when you look at a watch you see evidence of an unseen watchmaker. This is called the cosmological argument. Every known thing in the universe has a cause, a beginning, and the world could not exist on its own, therefore the universe itself must have a cause and the only reasonable or rational explanation for such a great and vast universe is a great and mighty God.

Psalm 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

There is the argument from harmony, design and order (teleological argument).

The wonder of the galaxies, the stars in their courses, the marvel of the intricacies of the human eye, the evidence of logic, order, and design argues for an intelligent and purposeful designer who is God. This is called the teleological argument, “teleo” meaning end or goal or purpose. This argument reasons that there’s too much complexity in the universe for it to all exist by change or random mutations even over billions of years.

Psalm 139:14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

There is the argument from being (ontological argument).

This argument says that it is better to exist than not to exist and that God is that being “greater than which nothing can be imagined.” Therefore God exists. An absolutely perfect being must exist out of necessity. This argument for being (which is what “onto” means) was famously developed by Anselm in the 12th century.

Isaiah 46:9-10 for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’

There’s the argument from the knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil (moral argument).

This argument reasons that the existence of our conscience and our knowledge of right and wrong, and our strong desire for justice and our sense of an internal law all point to a lawgiver who is God. The universal inherent sense of what’s right and wrong couldn’t have just evolved, because then there would be no foundation for any moral understand. Everything would be relative.

James 4:12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.

To these four major and classic proofs could be added as many as 30 other proofs. But let’s be clear. We cannot argue our way to a proof of God’s existence. All of these proofs have been just as strongly argued against and these proofs have not delivered many converts to Christianity.

The Bible never takes the path of proofs and arguments. The Bible simply affirms the existence of God. “In the beginning, God ...” God is the one who needs no proof.

According to Scripture God has made Himself known and we are the ones actively, rebelliously working hard to suppress the proof, to deny any knowledge of his existence.

Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

Why is he a fool?

Romans 1:19-28 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, ... 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie ...

The truth about God is inherently known and to deny Him one must actively and willfully reject Him. As Scripture says, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1).

God’s Essence or being or nature. What is He like?

The Belgic Confession assuming the existence of God begins with a simple statement about the essence of God, a statement about the nature or character of God. This is about who He is and what He’s like. No word yet about what He does or has done. This is about being, about pure essence or essential nature.

“We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God.”

God is Single, there is one God.

This should be self-evident. There can only be one Supreme Being. A Supreme Being is the greatest thing that can be conceived of and only one Supreme Being can be the greatest. If there were a God greater than God then that God would be the greatest. There can only be one supremely, infinitely great God who is the creator and maker and sustainer of everything else.

The Belgic follows the testimony of Scripture, which of course reveals there is only one God.

Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Deuteronomy 32:39 ““See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God.

I Corinthians 8:6 there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist.

Ephesians 4:5-6 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There is numerically in the universe only one God. All the rest of the so called gods are idols fashioned by the minds and hands of men.

Psalm 115:4-8 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

5 They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

6 They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.
7 They have hands, but do not feel feet, but do not walk;
and they do not make a sound in their throat.
8 Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

Our world is filled with idols. John Calvin famous said the in the heart of every man and woman is an idol factory. My heart and your heart are constantly manufacturing idols.

So if I say that you have idols in your heart, do you take offense? Probably not, you might be willing to agree in a general way that you have idols. But what would you say if I pointed you out by name and named a specific idol you have? Then you might get defensive, you might deny it at first, and then you might start defending it and saying why it's not really an idol, it's a good thing, a necessary thing.

If I say I don't have any idols I am self-deluded. I have idols, some I see and know well and have to fight. Others I don't see and need help to see. That's true of you as well. And if you and I are wise we are seeking God's wisdom and discernment and help to tear down the idols in our hearts.

We have for too long made peace with too many idols. We sacrifice daily to the idols of peace and comfort and ease and affluence and reputation and greed and lust and self, selfishness, self-interest.

We need to tear down these idols so our confession of one true God has integrity. We believe in one true God and we have on others besides Him.

How do you define God? And how do you do it in a sentence? The Belgic has one of the shortest, most concise definitions in all the creeds. God is in His essence simple and spiritual.

God is simple.

Simple or simplicity can sound confusing to us. Of course it's not saying God is simplistic or that God is a simpleton or even that God is easy to figure out. It's saying God is not a complexity of lots of component parts.

The Thirty-Nine Articles and the Westminster Confession make a point of saying God is "without body, parts, or passions."

In God's essential essence He is simple. We are body and soul, two parts. God is indivisible. Yes, He is a tri-personal, but that doesn't affect or change that in His essence He is simple.

He can't be cut up into parts, one part Father, one part Son and one part Spirit. And He can't be cut up into one part love, one part power, and one part holy.

He is not Father, plus Son, plus Holy Spirit. He is not love, plus holiness, plus power, plus mercy. He is not a sum of lots of parts. The whole essence of God is God, is light, is love, is spirit. All His essence and all His attributes are one. He is 100% love and 100% light and 100% spirit. He is one simple indivisible Being.

Why is this important? Who really cares besides theologians? Well, let me ask this, if you ask the average American, “What is God like?” how will they most likely answer? They will say God is love. And when they say that, what are they saying?

They are putting God’s love up against God’s other attributes. They single out love over against wrath or justice or righteousness or wisdom or power. They are saying that love is the most important attribute or aspect of God’s essence. They are dividing God. God is love and all of His other attributes equally and at the same time and always.

When we read:

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

God is both faithful and just at the same time.

Romans 3:26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God is just and merciful at the same time. God is wrathful and loving at the same time. He pours out His wrath for our sins on Christ and He pours out His love to us through Christ.

God is spirit.

We have less issue with God in His essence being spiritual. We know Scripture plainly teaches God is spirit (John 4:24).

God is spiritual, immaterial, invisible, distinct from all that He has made. This is why the second commandment says what it does.

Deuteronomy 5:8 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

God is spirit, immaterial and invisible, incapable of being depicted in any image. Every image is a lie that diminishes and robs the glory of God.

This is a point of doctrine that is useful to know and use when talking to a Mormon. They believe God the Father is a glorified man with a body like ours.

God is utterly and completely different from us. He does not have flesh and bones. All of our mental pictures or images of God are creaturely. He’s like an old man with a long grey beard, He’s like a great king on a throne, He’s like a dear old grandpa. Even these mental images of God are violations of the Second Commandment.

Angels are spirit, but they are created spirits. They are not like God.

Psalms 113:4-6 The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens!

5 *Who is like the Lord our God*, who is seated on high,

6 who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?

Who is like God? No one and nothing and certainly no god. He is unique and above all.

God's Names.

Our confession names only one name, God.

In Hebrew He is Yahweh, rendered as LORD in our OT. I AM, the self-existent, always existing God. This is His covenant name, the name by which He swears and promises.

We are not just theists, we are Yahwehists. We don't just believe in God in general, we believe and confess a specific, concrete, known and knowable God. He is not an abstraction, He is a living, personal God with a real name.

He revealed Himself to Moses by name, "I am that I am."

Exodus 6:2-3 God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.

Application and Conclusion.

We live in a world filled with unbelief, with denial, with outright rejection. Disbelief ripples through our world with profound affects as well. We live in a culture that increasingly has no fear of God (Romans 3:18). Ours is a truly lost world when it refuses to believe in the God who can be known.

How are we to live in such a world? How do we oppose the unbelieving spirit of our age? How do we give an answer for the hope that lies within us? We confess it, we declare it, we believe it, we live it. We say to our world, "We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God."

"I believe in God." What a grand and beautiful and powerful statement. The simplest and most profound statement a man can say. A statement like that ripples through a person's life and touches and affects everything.

I believe in God. With all my heart, and soul, and mind and strength, I believe in God and love God. I believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that God is God.

The knowledge of God is the greatest knowledge you can have, this knowledge will make you wise.

May our study of our God as revealed in Scripture be a light to our eyes and a joy to our hearts and a peace to our minds. May we grow in our love and devotion to God and to God alone.