

## **Comprehending the Eternal Union of God**

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### **Introduction: Difficulties comprehending the doctrine of God.**

The unity and diversity of the Trinity is a true mystery. There are different possible approaches, whether conducting an historical analysis of Augustine's *On the Trinity* or an exegetical analysis of John 17. Perhaps the topic is best expressed through the well-delineated Athanasian Creed. While this article will not be an exposition of the content of the creed, it will provide an analysis of the theological and philosophical assumptions and presuppositions necessary for us to understand the content of the creed. Understanding the presuppositions of God's eternal union will aid in comprehending union with Christ which is the theme of the other articles in this journal.

There are problems with the word "comprehending" in the title. We have to deal with what factors are necessary for people to "comprehend" complex Biblical truth. The first task is to analyze the nature of the language that we use to speak of this Divine phenomenon.

### ***Language***

The place to begin discussion is the medium of discussion itself: language. There are at least three types of language used in the Bible as well as in common life. While there are a number of possible words to describe those types, we speak of ordinary language, scientific language, and poetic language.

To make the different types clear, here are some biblical examples, all of which concern wheat. An example of ordinary language comes from Genesis 30:14, "In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field..." A scientific use is from Ezra 7:21-22, "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province beyond the river: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat..." Here the King made an order for a specific amount of wheat that was able to be weighed and measured. The unit of measure was called a cor which was about 6 bushels. This description of wheat has scientific precision.

The final example is poetic. Song of Solomon 7:2, "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies." In this verse the author was describing a woman's body part. If we read this description with either scientific or even ordinary language, the woman would easily be insulted which would be the opposite of the author's purpose.

Among the three types, ordinary language is foundational to the other two. Scientific and poetic language improves upon or expands ordinary language in different cognitive directions. In general, scientific and poetic are artificial perfections of ordinary language, because they depend

upon human skill for the communicative improvements.<sup>1</sup> For discussion of the doctrine of God, we need to focus on the third type of language, the poetic.

The famous Oxford professor of literature, C. S. Lewis, said that one of the main differences between English poetry and English prose is that poetry contains more adjectives. This observation could easily be dismissed as an immature generalization from a non-expert if stated by me—but not so when articulated by an undoubtedly brilliant scholar. Lewis' point is important. In the biblical example of poetic language, Solomon was embarrassingly fulsome in his vivid and detailed description of his lover's body. There is a good reason why both biblical and English poetry uses so many descriptive words. It is because poetic language wants to bombard the reader with an abundance of factual information, which, from an ordinary language point of view, is either irrelevant or even platitudinous.<sup>2</sup> Providing that abundance is one of poetry's important functions. On reflection, many would offer that the purpose of poetic language is to arouse emotion rather than provide information. While there is no question that poetic language can arouse emotion, poetry is not merely a stimulant of emotion but is a real and very important medium of information.<sup>3</sup>

Relative to communication, there is a unique aspect to poetic language. Poetic language is best at describing events experientially. Poetic language can communicate a quality of experience that the author understands—but which the reader has not had. It is good communicating something that is not normally accessible to others. To make that communication, poetic language will use information from within our own experience so that the information becomes a pointer to something that is outside of our experience.<sup>4</sup> Thus, experience, including religious experience, is often best expressed in poetic language.<sup>5</sup>

Each language type has its strengths and weaknesses. In the biblical example of scientific language, we know why King Artaxerxes made his decree and how the decree was carried out. This is a strength. We have observed poetic language's strength in its ability to communicate experience, making it better suited than scientific language to do such. However, poetic language also has a distinct disadvantage. Information that is given via poetic language has to be met halfway.

To comprehend what Solomon was trying to communicate requires that the reader begin by trusting him. Solomon had something to say, and Christian readers want to understand his message. We believe what he has to say and then we want to understand.<sup>6</sup>

The questions that are answered by the scientific example are inappropriate to ask the King poet Solomon: we do not know how his lover's belly can be a heap of wheat. He wants to communicate information in a different fashion than scientific.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, "The Language of Religion," *The Seeing Eye and Other Selected Essays from Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 175, 178.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 183: "All our sensuous experience is in this condition."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 179. *Credo ut intelligam* is the only attitude.

Hopefully, we can begin to see how important poetic language is to analysis of the doctrine of God. The Bible communicates ancient information by people personally unknown to us which we as believers must listen to sympathetically and try to translate those experiences in a way that is meaningful to us. We trust and believe the God who speaks and try to comprehend. The old Latin phrase *credo ut intelligam* is part of the very language of the doctrine of God.<sup>7</sup> As we move closer to the topic, it is perhaps clear by now that language about the nature of God's unity cannot be communicated adequately via scientific language or even ordinary language. However, poetic language can only properly communicate when the reader trusts the speaker and wants to comprehend whatever it is that the poet is saying.<sup>8</sup> Recognizing the need for unique language when it comes to the doctrine of God, we need to confront the problem of its unique content.

### **Content Problem**

Knowing these three types of language helps us to understand the difficulty of communicating any type of content to another person. The problem of communicating the content of God's unity can be illustrated by two examples.

One example is the simple task to describe something that can be seen, like a mountain. Suppose you are from Pittsburgh and you travel to the Rocky Mountains and want to describe them. Your view from the hotel window would show a certain beauty of the mountains. However, when you travel to the highest public observation sight, the mountains would appear even more majestic.

A geologist would claim to know more about the mountain than you do. He or she would know the geological layers and formations that make up the huge structure.<sup>9</sup> Different still would be the mountain climber, moving on the very face of the mountain, being up close, who has a different view. He would laugh if I claimed to "see" or "know" the mountains as he does.

Yet the question that we must ask concerning describing the mountains is: "Which one of the various presentations is the true view?" The answer is that whether viewed from a hotel window, from an observation post situated on the mountain, by a geologist or a climber, each perspective, though different, is true. The simple task of communicating about a mountain to another person requires a richness of language. Now, if we move to the task of describing another person, describing a mountain seems easy!

The second example parallels the first in some ways. It is the mystery of the self. A person, like a mountain, is visible. A person can be weighed and measured, his socio-economic background can be studied, and his age can be precisely described. However, if asked to describe ourselves, few of us would say that we are simply the summary of this scientific data. We would argue that the description is inadequate as we give further details about ourselves, like our favorite colors, music, or foods. In fact, there is mystery in trying to describe the self.<sup>10</sup> Each self functions with complex roles such as parent, worker, or student. The self that we present at work is sometimes

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 228. The problem is not limited to the gigantic. Physicists tell us that there are small particles of tables or trees, clouds or mountains. Underneath is the atom, in the long run you find mathematical formulas. 229: the mathematics may be true about reality but is not the reality itself any more than contour lines are real mountains.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 228: What is one's ordinary self? It is "...a mere façade. There's a huge area out of sight behind it." 229: Every further discovery deepens the mystery.

a one-dimensional façade of our full selves. Our work colleagues may think that they know us, but there can be huge areas of our lives that are simply out of their sight.

Furthermore, it takes months or years to get to know another person. Given the high divorce rate, it could be argued that few people actually “know” the other self when they agree to marry. Sadly, pastors know how difficult it is truly to get to “know” a person in the congregation. Like the mountain, there are parts of people that are immediately apparent but there is always more to know on closer inspection.

Now we turn to consider God and creation.<sup>11</sup> Moving to “knowing” God in terms of content means knowing that God who created the heavens and the earth. Before that creation, our great God lived entirely outside of space and time. However, human beings live only within space and time, and thus cannot comprehend that which is outside of creation. When we creatures think about God we must remember that for God to teach us about himself, in a way that we can understand, he must enter into space and time.<sup>12</sup> Through the creation, God speaks with covenantal language to his people.<sup>13</sup>

The human word for “unity” relative to comprehending God’s unity is written in a space-time key that is foreign to the music of God’s own universe. To say that his divine “unity” is exactly the same as our concept of “unity” is nothing short of nonsensical.<sup>14</sup>

Given that reality, all human thinking about God, or knowledge of God, is properly termed ectypal—in contrast to that which is archetypal.<sup>15</sup> God is self-contained and he is the archetype. He is the original.<sup>16</sup> Humans are created analogues of him and man’s being is analogical of God’s being.<sup>17</sup> Thus our thinking is ectypal. An implication that flows from this biblical distinction is that Christians should think concretely of God, not abstractly. When believers want to comprehend God’s being or unity, they cannot simply use abstract philosophical notions such as the analogy of being. Such an argument would simply posit that “God is that which nothing greater can be conceived”

In conclusion, believers must admit that it is not easy to describe something that we can see and feel, such as a mountain or a man. Thus, we should be overwhelmed by the challenge of how to describe God’s unity. Certainly both the language of the doctrine as well as the content is unique and rich. Admitting the difficulties faced so far, as well as understanding how they can be

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<sup>11</sup> See Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Crossway, 2011), 181f.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *The Seeing Eye*, 229. If you are a person who “has to believe that all things which exist must have unity it will seem to you irritably probable that what lies ultimately behind the one façade also lies ultimately behind the other.”

<sup>13</sup> Oliphint, *God With Us*.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, *The Seeing Eye*, 227: “If God created the universe, He created space-time, which is to the universe as the metre is to a poem or the key is to music. To look for Him as one item within the frame which he himself invented in nonsensical.”

<sup>15</sup> Oliphint, *God With Us*, 91-92.

<sup>16</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1974), 215. Hereafter, *Introduction*, 203.

<sup>17</sup> Van Til, *Introduction*, 205: “We must speak of God anthropomorphically. The Scripture speaks of God in that way.”

overcome, takes us to the next task of presenting a biblically faithful doctrine of God's unity- the relationship between God's being and attributes.

### ***Being and Attributes Identical*<sup>18</sup>**

The Bible teaches that God is characterized or comprehended by his attributes; that his being and his attributes are identical. They are not, and cannot be, in some type of an "economic" or functional relationship, because the two are identical with each other.

Thus, when a theologian tries to insert either "economic" (functional) or "ontological" (being) hierarchies into his analysis of God's attributes, his own method produces unnecessary difficulties.<sup>19</sup> Analysis of God's being and attributes requires a methodological balance. For this reason, when describing God, the word 'perfections' is superior to the word 'attributes'. Each divine 'attribute' is perfect, thus one 'completely perfect attribute' cannot be economically superior to another 'completely perfect attribute'.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding method, since believers love our heavenly Father and want to know more about him, and God's perfections are beyond any human concept, theologians, with a humble and godly attitude, must turn to God himself for aid.<sup>21</sup> Since God has revealed himself in his word, a proper approach will analyze God's attributes or perfections as he himself has revealed them in the historical unfolding of his special revelation.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, while choosing a God-honoring path is a good first step, that beginning does not solve the methodological problem.<sup>23</sup>

Commencing with God's self-revelation in the Hebrew Bible, the Christian has to determine levels of continuity and discontinuity with the New Testament concerning God's perfections or attributes. Moving then to the New Testament itself, the best approach embraces a well developed biblical-theological method that begins with God's revelation in the gospels and ends with the book of Revelation. It is a demanding task even to try to summarize what the Bible says about God! Yet theologians must attempt to do so. Our method will incorporate the nature of God's being itself in the analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, "'Something Much Too Plain to Say': A Systematic Theological Apologetic," in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 364: "The problem is ... an inherent incompatibility or inconsistency either between his attributes, or between his attributes and the properties of creation."

<sup>19</sup> See Rick Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 1:273, 637.

<sup>20</sup> Since the church safeguards God's originality, the incommunicable attributes precede the communicable. See Oliphint, *God With Us*, 87-88 who argues that God's essential attributes must be comprehended Christologically.

<sup>21</sup> While philosophically and intellectually difficult, believers have valid knowledge of God. Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:18: "Scripturally speaking, a valid claim of knowledge of God presupposes the integration of that knowledge into the life of the knower, to the extent that the knower is not merely cognizant of facts, but actually changed in thought, volition, and action by those facts."

<sup>22</sup> J. Van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 165: "The only acceptable and reliable approach [to comprehending God's attributes] is that of revelation (*via revelationis*)."

<sup>23</sup> Theologians have chosen different approaches as to how to distinguish among God's attributes. In the nineteenth century, Robert Dabney began with what the human mind can think about God outside of his special revelation. More recently, Robert Reymond used the Westminster Shorter Catechism as a structure, and John Frame the central motif of God as Lord of the Covenant. For more information, see Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:650-53, and notes 96-107.

## ***Aseity and Simplicity***

*Aseity.* God said of himself in Exodus 3:14, “I am” or “I will be what I will be.”<sup>24</sup> God’s self-existence is denominated as his aseity. Aseity means that God is not dependent upon anything besides his own being. God is the source of his own being.

A good presentation for God’s aseity follows these lines. First, God owns all things on heaven and earth, and all that his creatures possess is given to them by God’s hand.<sup>25</sup> Second, God does not owe anything to his creation nor does he have any needs that are based upon the creation.<sup>26</sup> All of God’s virtues or perfections (analyzed in the next section) are included in his aseity.

The particular difficulty with God’s aseity is that there are no cognitive or intellectual parallels to it in secular thinking. There have been many attempts to find something similar in competing philosophical or theological systems. Those systems try to find something which is “of itself” or, in Latin, a *se* in the sphere of being, of knowing, or of doing—but they all fail. No non-Christian thought has been able to locate those ultimates in a single principle. While God’s aseity is intellectually difficult, such a great God is also our boast. The aseity of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob gives an ultimate reference in human thinking.<sup>27</sup> He is the equal ultimacy of unity and plurality.

*Simplicity.*<sup>28</sup> The Bible teaches God’s oneness or numerical unity, also known as his ‘simplicity’.<sup>29</sup> God’s simplicity includes his unity. The Old Testament rejected the notion of there being more than one God, and the words of the *Sh’ma* at Deuteronomy 6:4 proclaimed God as absolute numerical identity.<sup>30</sup> The Old Testament also taught that God was non-physical, with no parts. In continuity, the New Testament teaches that God is one.<sup>31</sup>

Theologians divide analysis of God’s unity into two categories. First is God’s unity of singularity (that there is only one God), and second is his unity of simplicity (that he is not made of parts). The two notions imply each other and the denial of the one is the denial of the other.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, c2003), 2:151-52.

<sup>25</sup> See Gen. 14:19; Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12; and James 1:17.

<sup>26</sup> See Isa. 40:19-20; Luke 17:10; Rom. 11:35-36. The summary is dependent upon Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, c2013) 407-11.

<sup>27</sup> See Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 412.

<sup>28</sup> Oliphint, *God With Us*, 67, argues divine simplicity: “Affirms not that God has a nature but that God is his nature.”

<sup>29</sup> See Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1981), 111.

<sup>30</sup> Van Til, *Introduction*, 215-16. It is not correct to separate universals from the Godhead. If we begin with human ultimacy, then there is no predication. If we fail to comprehend aseity, then there is no notion of God’s self-existence.

<sup>31</sup> See also John 10:30, 38; 14:10-11; and 1 John 5:7.

<sup>32</sup> Frame, *Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 55.

This divine simplicity is related to God's spiritual nature and is connected to his invisibility. Even though he is simple, or possesses 'qualitative oneness', we can still distinguish between God's various perfections or attributes because that is how he has revealed himself.<sup>33</sup>

In conformity to his oneness or simplicity, and wondrous to contemplate, the Old Testament also demonstrated that God is also a plurality of persons. Specifically, the Lord, the Spirit, and the Wisdom of God were personified and differentiated.<sup>34</sup>

It is intellectually difficult to hold on to God's simplicity combined with his multiplicity.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, this is Scripture's teaching. God's simplicity reminds believers that God's relationship with his people is fully personal.<sup>36</sup>

## **Comprehending the Trinity**

### ***Relations between the Persons of the Trinity***

*Equality in Being and Works.* The three persons are in an intimate communion with each other.<sup>37</sup> The three persons permeate each other and none exists without the other two persons. There is a mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity. Theologians use the Greek term *perichoresis* or the Latin *circumincessio* to describe that mutual relationship.

Besides being in unity, the triune God also works in equality among the three persons.<sup>38</sup> That statement does not mean that each person performs the same works. It is the Son, for example, and no other person, who died on the cross. Paul's doctrine of salvation clearly demonstrated the full and equal working of the three persons of the Trinity relative to salvation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:653-54.

<sup>34</sup> Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:633-36. For the Word of God, see Psalm 33:6, 9. For the Spirit of God, see Gen. 1:2; Ps. 51:11, 104:30; 139:7; and Isa. 48:16, 63:10. The Holy Spirit sets apart for ministry at Isa. 61:1 and is grieved at Isa. 63:9f. For the Wisdom of God, see Proverbs 3:12-31.

<sup>35</sup> Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 428-31 argues that Thomas Aquinas wrongly held to a total absence of multiplicity in God.

<sup>36</sup> Thus, it may be wise to emphasize God's necessary existence rather than to focus on his divine simplicity in the abstract. See Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 433.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine advanced the church's understanding of the relationship. Later, the Greek term "perichoresis" was used (since the 8<sup>th</sup> century) to describe this communion. The expression was affirmed (in the fifteenth century) at the Council of Florence. Calvin taught the same in *Institutes* 1.13.19, 143: "The Father is wholly in the Son, the Son wholly in the Father, even as he himself declares: 'I am in the Father, and the Father in me.'" Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 1:461 cited the Greek term and its meaning with approval.

<sup>38</sup> See Bavinck, *CRD*, 158-59; Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 631-43; and Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 479.

<sup>39</sup> Paul formulated his understanding of redemption in terms of adoptive Sonship, which connected back to God's earlier work, as unity in Trinity, to Israel's adopted Sonship. Paul's teaching was probably most clearly presented at Ephesians 3:1-13. For more information, see Chapter 15 on Christ's work of redemption and Christ's eternal Sonship as the archetype for his salvific work in time. See also David B. Garner, "The First and the Last Son: Christology and Sonship in Pauline Soteriology," in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 272-78.

Theologians can rightly differentiate between what they term the “ontological” Trinity in contrast to the “economic” Trinity.<sup>40</sup> These distinctions are simply tools that are made by creatures to try to help us to understand our Creator.<sup>41</sup>

The ontological Trinity is a way to describe God as he exists apart from his relationship to creation.<sup>42</sup> It is a way to describe God as self-complete, involving the equal ultimacy of unity and plurality, of the one and many.<sup>43</sup> The economic Trinity, on the other hand, is a way to describe God as he relates to people and his creation.<sup>44</sup>

The history of theology demonstrates that there is one basic Trinitarian heresy- when someone mixes the temporal with the eternal in ultimate union. Addressing contemporary theological debate, it is not correct to equate the legitimate term “perichoresis” with the intra-trinitarian covenant.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, while this truth has been attacked by many through the centuries, the doctrine of the Trinity is not unnecessarily speculative.<sup>46</sup> It is not too much for the Church to demand belief in this doctrine. God, viewed as Trinity, is a rich presentation of the beauty of God in relationship with himself.<sup>47</sup> The concepts of God’s oneness, as well as his threeness, while intellectually difficult, are not truly contradictory.<sup>48</sup> Also, knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity is worthwhile because the sinner’s own redemption must be comprehended as an act of the unified God as Trinity. Those saving thoughts and actions of God spring from before creation, to Christ’s incarnation and resurrection, to the creation of Christ’s church, the very body of Christ inhabited by the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Knowing God***

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament did not try philosophically to prove God’s existence—it was taken for granted.<sup>50</sup> The New Testament presented two basic options, either to accept

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<sup>40</sup> For more information on the Ontological and Economic Trinity and related topics, see Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 706-19.

<sup>41</sup> Van Til, *Introduction*, 225. The Nicene creed emphasized that the internal relationship of the Persons of the Trinity is prior to and independent of the relation of the Godhead to creation.

<sup>42</sup> See Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 205-06.

<sup>43</sup> See Van Til, *Introduction*, 223 and Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:88.

<sup>44</sup> See Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:273: “...the Trinity has an economy of functions while maintaining an ontological equality, there can be an economy of functions within human beings.”

<sup>45</sup> Some have said that “representation and mutual indwelling are the quintessential issues of the covenant. See Ralph Allan Smith, “A Response to the OPC Committee on the Doctrine of Justification,” 2.

<sup>46</sup> Bavinck, *CRD*, 161; Van Til, *Introduction*, 223.

<sup>47</sup> Bavinck, *CRD*, 160.

<sup>48</sup> Yet, the doctrine of the Trinity is also more than intellectually difficult. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:445: “To say that this doctrine is incomprehensible, is to say nothing more than must be admitted of any other great truth....”

<sup>49</sup> Bavinck, *CRD*, 161, 163.

<sup>50</sup> See Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:277.



the assumption of God's existence or to reject both God and his divine self-revelation.<sup>51</sup> There were no formal scriptural proofs for God's existence, since his existence was simply a given.

However, knowledge of God's existence was not some type of blind faith. Rather, it was and is based on seen facts.<sup>52</sup> While he physically revealed himself in the Old Testament, another way that God was known was through his creating men and women in his image. He has revealed himself in humanity because men and women reflect God's image. Thus, as creatures created in his image, God is known 'innately'. This knowledge is sometimes called 'natural revelation'.<sup>53</sup> However, phrases like 'natural revelation' or 'universal intuitive truths', if used at all, must be defined and used carefully. Something may be 'universally believed' but still not be true!<sup>54</sup>

God has also revealed himself in his creation. Although there is this revelation of God in 'nature' that is not the 'special' revelation found exclusively in Scripture, we must be careful when we use the expression 'natural theology' based on general revelation.<sup>55</sup> Knowledge about God that comes from general revelation requires special revelation to interpret it properly.<sup>56</sup>

Also, from the time of humanity's fall into sin, we have faced a problem relative to knowing God and his spirituality. God is a spirit and we are flesh. We want to be able to see him. Such a desire is not necessarily sinful, as manifested in Moses' desire to see God—which God granted. The answer to this significant problem was that God revealed himself in 'flesh'.<sup>57</sup> It is Christ who has made God known.

Finally, the New Testament underlined what was already clear in the Old, that knowledge of God is a unique type of knowledge. Human knowledge of God is not something purely intellectual, but is also relational.<sup>58</sup> Knowledge of God is something personal—to know him is to be in a relationship with him. Truly to know him requires faith.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 74, 76.

<sup>52</sup> Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:278.

<sup>53</sup> See Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:194. The full knowledge of God, for example as defined by the WCF, is not innate. Hodge defined that limited innate knowledge of God as, "...this sense of dependence and accountability to a being higher than themselves [that] exists in the minds of all men." Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (New York, 1877), 1:191-92, 195. For more information, see John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 176; Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 27-28; Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, 41-43; and Van Til, *Introduction*, 194-95.

<sup>54</sup> Hodge wisely said that a truly intuitive, universal truth applies to those truths "...which have their foundation or evidence in the constitution of our nature." *Systematic Theology*, 1:194.

<sup>55</sup> See Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:279-82, 281: "The revelation of God that is found in humanity (as created in his image) and in creation (also called general revelation) is not the same thing as 'natural theology'." It is not certain that we can speak of a 'natural theology' at all. For example, Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:195, says that the sublime definition of the WCF can only be attained from special revelation. Hodge made careful limits.

<sup>56</sup> Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:282. More information on the historical development of what some call "natural theology" will be found in volume 3.

<sup>57</sup> Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:279-80.

<sup>58</sup> Bavinck, *CRD*, 118: "God's incomprehensibility does not render knowledge of God impossible. This is then knowledge of a unique nature." see Ps. 34:8 and Jer. 22:15-16. This peculiar usage of the word is different from the "normal" understanding, which usually is intellectual.

<sup>59</sup> Bavinck, *CRD*, 117, 121.

Another way that the relational aspect is manifested is to say that for a human to know God meant that he also feared God. They always went hand in hand.<sup>60</sup> The prophet Jeremiah was in a deeply personal relationship with God, and Hosea and Isaiah also taught that it was more important for God's people to know God than to present burnt offerings to him.<sup>61</sup> To know God was to give him his due honor.<sup>62</sup> For men and women to know God truly requires knowledge that is based upon the solid rock of God's self revelation combined with the person's trust in that revelation.<sup>63</sup> Believers know God through the grace offered to us in Christ.

In conclusion, comprehending the eternal union of God requires facing the language and content problems, realizing that God's being and attributes are identical and underlining the importance of God's aseity and simplicity. After proper analysis, to know Him is to love and fear Him.

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<sup>60</sup> Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:600: "The knowledge of God is also connected to public righteousness." "It would necessarily follow that when God's people seek to know him, their way of life will make them more like the Lord himself. Such knowing changes one's fundamental character."

<sup>61</sup> While Jeremiah felt that he was ill equipped for the task, God understood that need and gave him amazing promises, see Jer. 1:6. God expressed his love for the prophet at 31:3. See Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:584. See Hos. 6:6; 13:4-5, and Gamble, *Whole Counsel of God*, 1:599.

<sup>62</sup> Bavinck, *CRD*, 122.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 119: "To be able to live truly, we must know God." "Essential knowledge of God is knowledge that is based on revelation and faith."