



WHY DO WE BELIEVE *THAT* ?  
Introduction to Reformed Theology

**Class 7**

**FINISHING DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE  
&  
DOCTRINE OF GOD**

Education Year 2024-2025

Rev. Mark H. Vander Pol



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## Review

- Two Types of Revelation
  - General
  - Special
- Organic Verbal Plenary Inspiration
  - Doctrine of God's Providence
- Infallibility and Inerrancy of Scripture
- Perfections of Scripture
  - Authority
  - Necessity
  - Perspecuity
  - Sufficiency



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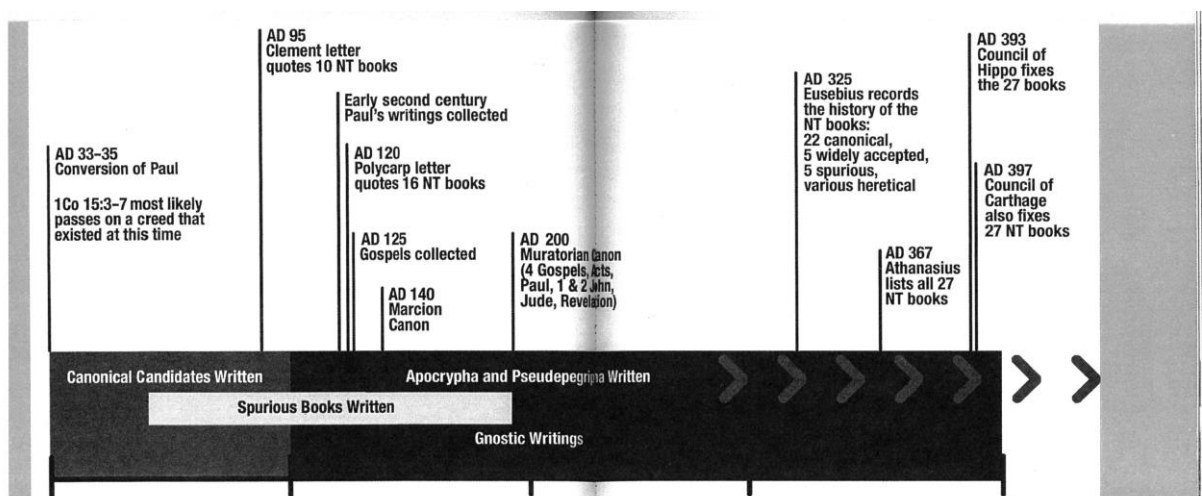
# Review

- Reliability
  - Thousands and thousands of manuscripts and fragments dating within the first few centuries after Christ.
    - Much different than other recognized ancient historical works that have only a handful of copies from many hundreds of years later.
  - Church Fathers were citing, copying, and distributing the Gospels and letters of the Apostles



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# NT Timeline



From Doug Powell, *Guide to Christian Apologetics*, 140-141.



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## Textual Criticism

- The attempt to discern what the “original autographs” contained with some degree of certainty.
- External Evidence
  - Manuscript volume, dates, location, etc.
- Internal Evidence - Different types of errors that can be introduced by copyists<sup>1</sup>
  - Faulty Eyesight – not distinguishing characters properly
    - 2 Peter 2:13 – ΑΠΑΤΑΙΣ (“love feasts”) vs. ΑΓΑΠΑΙΣ (“deceptions”).
    - Jumping over letters, words, lines when similar characters and words are used close together.
  - Faulty hearing – homophones, similar sounding vowels
  - Errors of the mind - synonyms, sequences, transposition, assimilation
  - Errors of judgment – adding previous comments into the text, combining columns

1. From Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 250-271.



## Textual Criticism Example – John 1:18

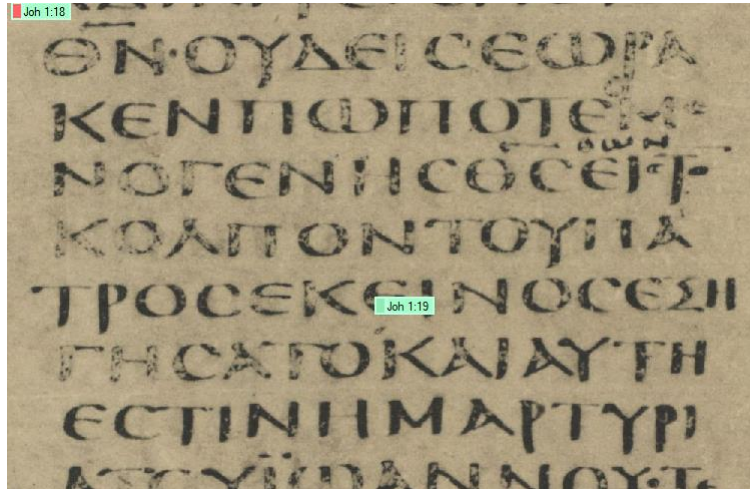
- English Translation
  - ESV – “No one has ever seen God; *the only God, ...*”
  - NKJ – “No one has seen God at any time. *The only begotten Son, ...*”
  - NIV – “No one has ever seen God. *but the one and only Son. who is himself God...*”

<sup>5</sup> 18 {B} μονογενῆς θεός Ϝ<sup>66</sup> Ϟ\* B C\* L syr<sup>p</sup>, h<sup>mg</sup> geo<sup>2</sup> Origen<sup>gr 2/4</sup> Didymus Cyril<sup>1/4</sup> // ὁ μονογενῆς θεός Ϝ<sup>75</sup> Ϟ<sup>2</sup> 33 cop<sup>bo</sup> Clement<sup>2/3</sup> Clement<sup>from Theodotus 1/2</sup> Origen<sup>gr 2/4</sup> Eusebius<sup>3/7</sup> Basil<sup>1/2</sup> Gregory-Nyssa Epiphanius Serapion<sup>1/2</sup> Cyril<sup>2/4</sup> // ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός A C<sup>3</sup> W<sup>supp</sup> Δ Θ Ψ 0141 f<sup>1</sup> f<sup>13</sup> 28 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 Byz [E F G H] Lect it<sup>a</sup>, aur, b, c, e, f, ff<sup>2,1</sup> v<sup>g</sup> syr<sup>c</sup>, h, pal arm eth geo<sup>1</sup> slav Irenaeus<sup>lat 1/3</sup> Clement<sup>from Theodotus 1/2</sup> Clement<sup>1/3</sup> Hippolytus Origen<sup>lat 1/2</sup> Letter of Hymenaeus Alexander Eustathius Eusebius<sup>4/7</sup> Serapion<sup>1/2</sup> Athanasius Basil<sup>1/2</sup> Gregory-Nazianzus Chrysostom Theodore Cyril<sup>1/4</sup> Proclus Theodoret John-Damascus; Tertullian Hegemonius Victorinus-Rome Ambrosiaster Hilary<sup>5/7</sup> Ps-Priscillian Ambrose<sup>10/11</sup> Faustinus Gregory-Elvira Phoebadius Jerome Augustine Varimadum // μονογενῆς υἱός θεοῦ it<sup>a</sup> Irenaeus<sup>lat 1/3</sup>; Ambrose<sup>1/11</sup> vid // ὁ μονογενῆς v<sup>g</sup>ms Ps-Vigilius<sup>1/2</sup>



## Σ – Sinaiticus (Fourth Century)

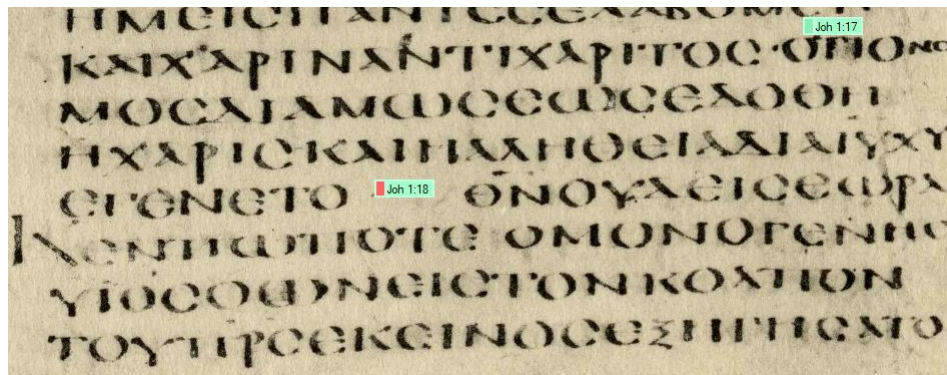
- μονογενής θεός (ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ ΘΕΟΣ)



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## Α – Alexandrinus (Fifth Century)

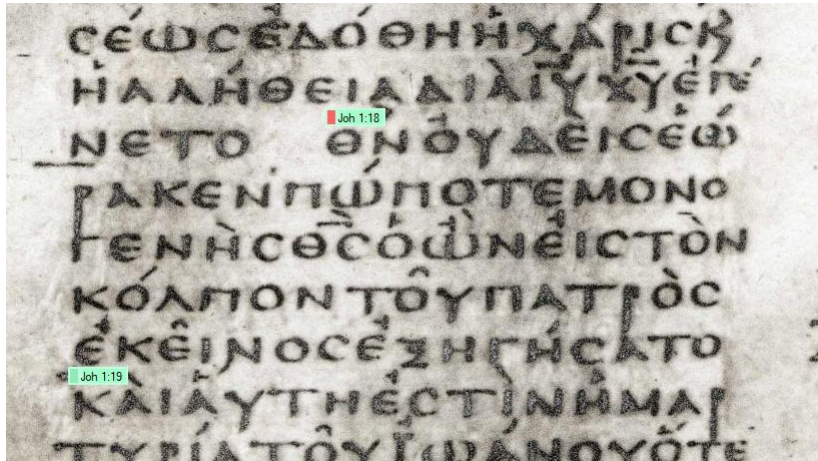
- μονογενής υιος (ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ ΥΙΟΣ)



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## B – Vaticanus (Fourth Century)

- μονογενῆς θεός (ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ ΘΕΟΣ)



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## Resources

- B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*
- Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology and Manual of Christian Doctrine*
- C.E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?*
- Douglas Powell, *The Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics*
- Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*
- Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*



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## WHY DO WE BELIEVE *THAT* ?

### Introduction to Reformed Theology

### Class 7

## DOCTRINE OF GOD

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## Doctrine of God

- BC I
  - We believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a
    - Single
    - And simple
    - Spiritual being whom we call God—
      - Eternal
      - Incomprehensible
      - Invisible
      - Unchangeable
      - Infinite
      - Almighty
      - Completely wise
      - Just
      - And Good
      - And the overflowing source of all good.



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## God's Transcendence

- God is God and we are not!
- The Creator / creature distinction – “The Categorical Distinction”
- Peter Jones, “The Christian faith maintains a separateness between God and his creation. We will never become God, and God remains the sovereign Lord.”<sup>1</sup>
- Gen 1:1
- Ps 50:21
- Is 55:8

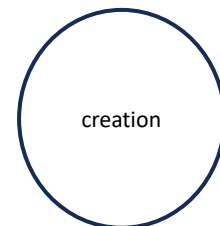
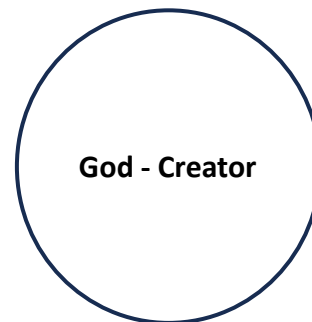
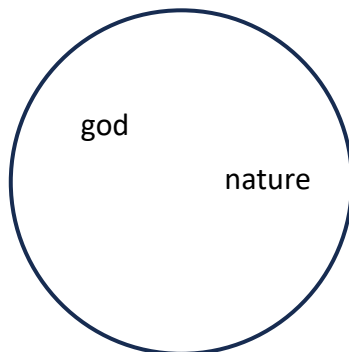
1. Peter Jones, *Gospel Truth, Pagan Lies*, 24.



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## Differing Worldviews

- Paganism – Oneism
- Theism – Twoism



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## Pagan – Monism / Oneism

- Peter Jones: Only two worldviews; mutually exclusive and antithetical belief systems.<sup>1</sup>
  - Romans 1:25, "...because they exchanged the truth about God for *the* lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."
- "Pantheism" – Everything is god.
- "Panentheism" – There is a god, but he is totally interrelated with the world.
  - He is the "supreme effect."

### **Contrary**

- Many Eastern / Mystical religions: Hinduism, New Age, witchcraft, worship of nature.
- Seen in the radical environmentalist movement and radical sexuality.

1. Peter Jones, *The Other Worldview*, 12.



## Knowing God

- "Epistemology" – study of knowledge
- How do we know anything about a transcendent and "wholly other" God?
  - Through his accommodation and condescension: a.k.a. "Revelation"
- Archetypal Knowledge vs. Ectypal Knowledge
  - Archetypal – what God knows
  - Ectypal – what we know or can know
    - Our knowledge never intersects God's knowledge.
    - It is true knowledge!
- God's knowledge is *quantitatively* different and *qualitatively* different.
- Deut 29:29
- Is 55:8





## Knowing God

- Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 54.

Neither being nor knowledge is ever shared univocally (i.e., identically) between God and creatures. As God's being is qualitatively and not just quantitatively distinct from ours, so too is God's knowledge. God's knowledge is archetypal (the original), while ours is ectypal (a copy), revealed by God and therefore accommodated to our finite capacities. Our imperfect and incomplete knowledge is always dependent on God's perfect and complete knowledge.

A covenantal ontology requires a covenantal epistemology. We were created as God's analogy (image bearers) rather than as self-existent sparks of divinity; therefore, our knowledge is also dependent rather than autonomous. So there is indeed such a thing as absolute, perfect, exhaustive, and eternal truth, but this knowledge is possessed by God, not by us. Rather, we have revealed truth, which God has accommodated to our capacity.



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## Reformed Epistemology

- Analogical – there is similarity between God's knowledge and our knowledge
  - No intersection, not merely parallel either. There is a similarity, and it can be approximate.
- Accommodated – God has given us what we need to know.
  - Mediated – not direct access, but what God has revealed
  - Christ – God's ultimate act of accommodation and condescension (God knows what it is to be human).
  - Preached Word – God comes near to us.
- There is mystery!
  - God has not revealed everything to us and there are paradoxes (for us).
  - We are not talking about contradictions



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## Reformed Epistemology

- Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 101.

The Christian faith is not opposed to reason, but to this systematic misuse of reason that presupposes unbelief in the God who has revealed himself in Scripture and preeminently in his Son. While every major Christian doctrine transcends our rational ability to comprehend it (contra rationalism), none transcends our rational ability to apprehend it (contra fideism).

A *mystery* is inexhaustible, but a *contradiction* is nonsense. For example, to say that God is one in essence and three in persons is indeed a mystery, but it is not a contradiction. Believers revel in the paradox of the God who became flesh, but divine and human natures united in one person is not a contradiction. It is not reason that recoils before such miracles as *ex nihilo* creation, the exodus, or the virginal conception, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather, it is the fallen heart of reasoners that refuses to entertain even the possibility of a world in which such divine acts occur.



## God's Attributes

- Two classes:
  - Incommunicable – those that belong to God alone
  - Communicable – those that humans can manifest to a (much) lesser degree
- We need to start our study of God's attributes in heaven, not on earth!
  - “If we are to understand life, we must start with what is true of God and, in light of that truth, interpret life here.”<sup>1</sup>
- God is all of his attributes all of the time. We cannot elevate one over the other.
  - Some have elevated God's love over all and have gotten rid of the cross and hell.

1. Terry L. Johnson, *The Excellencies of God*, viii.



## Incommunicable Attributes

- Independence or Self-Existence (aseity)
  - God is not dependent on anything external.
  - “This does not mean that God is incapable of relationship; it simply affirms that God relates creatures to himself but is not related to (i.e., dependent on) the world.”<sup>1</sup>
  - Is 40:13-26; John 5:36; Rom 11:33-34
- Immutability or unchangeableness
  - “He is forever the same, and therefore devoid of all change in his being, his perfections, his purposes, and his promises.”<sup>2</sup>
    - Mal 3:6; James 1:17
  - God does not “change his mind” – Passages that seem to indicate that (e.g. Ex 32:14; Jonah 3:10)
    - Calvin, “What then is meant by the term repentance? The very same that is meant by the other forms of expression, by which God is described to us humanly. Because our weakness cannot reach his height, any description which we receive of him must be lowered to our capacity in order to be intelligible. And the mode of lowering is to represent him not as he really is, but as we conceive of him. . . . [we] ought rather to consider the mode of speech accommodated to our sense.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 230.  
 2. Berkhof, *Manual*, 63.  
 3. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.17.13



## Incommunicable Attributes

- Infinity
  - Absolute perfection in his attributes (esp. the communicable attributes)
    - Job 11:7-11; Ps 145:3
  - Eternity – “God transcends time and possesses the whole of his life all at once. There is with him only an eternal present, and no past or future.”<sup>1</sup>
    - Ps 90:2; 102:27
  - Immensity or omnipresence – “fills every space with his whole being”<sup>2</sup> but not in a pantheistic manner as he remains transcendent.
    - 1 Kings 8:20; Ps 139:7-10; Jer 23:23-24
- Simplicity
  - God is not a composite nor is he divisible.
  - The three persons of the Godhead are not parts. “The whole being of God belongs to each one of the Persons. Hence we can also say that God and His attributes are one, and that He is life, light, love, righteousness, truth, and so on.”<sup>3</sup>
  - Not found in Scripture *per se*, but follows from his aseity and immutability.

1. Berkhof, *Manual*, 64.  
 2. Ibid.  
 3. Berkhof, *Summary*, 25.



## Communicable Attributes

- Knowledge (omniscience)
  - God knows all things comprehensively in himself.
  - He knows all things possible and actual.
  - Ps 139:1-16; Is 46:10; Heb 4:13
  - **Contrary**
    - Open-Theism – God doesn't know what men will do in the future because of their "free will."
    - Middle Knowledge – God knows all the possible outcomes, but isn't sure which one "free men" will choose. Arminians can fall into this camp.
- Wisdom
  - "That perfection of God by which he uses his knowledge for the attainment of his ends in the way that glorifies him most."<sup>1</sup>
    - Ps 104:24; Dan 2:20, 21b

Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, 20.



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## Communicable Attributes

- Goodness
  - God is kind and deals as such with his creatures.
  - Ps 104:21; 145:8-9; Matt 5:45
- Love
  - Grace – unmerited love that pardons sin
    - Rom 3:24; Eph 1:6-7
  - Mercy – relieving the consequences of sin
    - Rom 9:15-16, 18
  - Patience – bears with the sinner
    - Rom 2:4; 1 Peter 3:20



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## Communicable Attributes

- Holiness
  - God's distinctness from his creatures (transcendent)
  - Free from all moral impurity – morally perfect
  - Ex 15:11; Is 6:3-5; Hab 1:13
- Righteousness
  - “[God] maintains himself as the Holy One over against every violation of his holiness.”<sup>1</sup>
    - Ps 99:4; 145:17; Rom 1:32
  - Justice – giving of rewards (remunerative justice) or exercising punishment (retributive justice)

1. Berkhof, *Summary*, 26.



## Communicable Attributes

- Faithfulness (veracity)
  - God remains true in all things and keeps his promises
    - Num 23:19; 2 Tim 2:13
- Sovereignty
  - Sovereign will – the final cause of all things
    - Secret (decretive) and revealed (preceptive) will. Creatures cannot know the decretive will, but we can see the effects. God's preceptive will is revealed to us in God's law.
    - God can use even sinful actions for his purposes.
      - Gen 50:20; Acts 2:23
  - Sovereign power
    - God's omnipotence – God has the power to do his will.
    - God cannot lie, sin, deny himself
      - 2 Tim 2:13



## The Trinity

- God is one in essence and three in persons – BC 8
  - The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all persons and all truly and fully God.
  - In order for this to be, Christ needs to be fully God (and yet fully man in his incarnation), and the Holy Spirit needs to be a person.
- Economic Trinity
  - How *we* can understand the Trinity in their relations to us
    - HC 24
- **Contrary**
  - Every other religion!
    - Sects: Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons
    - Unitarians
  - Social Trinity – three persons, one family.<sup>1</sup>
    - Emphasizes the three persons over the one essence

Clark, ST604 Class Notes, 9.26.07.



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## Scriptural Proofs of the Trinity

- Plurality in the Old Testament
  - Gen 1:26; 11:7
  - Angel of the LORD: Gen 16:7-13
  - Spirit as a person: Is 48:16
- Clearer in the New Testament
  - Baptism of Jesus Matt 3:16-17
  - All three persons listed: Matt 28:19, 2 Cor 13:14



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## Resources

Any systematic theology book with many others on the Doctrine of God specifically

- Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*
- Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine, Manual of Christian Doctrine, and Systematic Theology*
- Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*
- Terry Johnson, *The Excellencies of God and The Identity and Attributes of God*
- Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One: Theology Proper*



## Resources

- Peter Jones
  - *Spirit Wars*
  - *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*
  - *Gospel Truth / Pagan Lies*
  - *The Other Worldview*
- Carl Trueman
  - *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*





# Next Week

- Doctrine of Christ

