

Sovereign Grace Series

Lesson #2 – God’s Absolute Simplicity ²⁰⁰²

Amplifying Attachments for Lesson #2

<u>File #</u>	<u>Title</u>	
0798	The Simplicity of God;	Ray Weedon
1129	Theological Primer; The Simplicity of God;	Kevin DeYoung
1136	The Simplicity of God;	James E. Dolezal

Applicable Sections of Confessions:

LBC; Chapter 2; Section 1 God is “- - - a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, **parts**, or passions, - - -”

The Simplicity of God is technically, not an attribute, but rather an essential part of God’s nature regarding His attributes, namely that He is at essence only ***One** attribute which includes all that Scripture describes about God. Another name for this attribute is “**Unity**”. God is unified into only ***One** attribute. God is entirely consistent within Himself. He is fully integrated. There is nothing within Him that conflicts with any and all that He is.

I. Definition of God’s Simplicity

- * **“One** 1. Being a single entity, unit, object, individual, or being.
- 2. Characterized by unity; of a single kind or nature; undivided; with one accord. - - - “

First 2 of 7 definitions.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language , College Edition; 1978

God is without parts. He is not a composite of attributes, rather He is fully integrated in His very nature and cannot be subdivided. He is not made up of attributes, rather He is all of these attributes. Every attribute of God is entirely His essence. God is a Unity in His essence. He is One, not many in His nature.

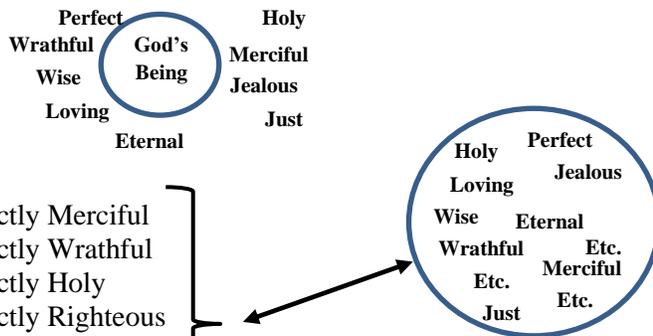
We sub-divide His attributes in order to study His essence as a way of trying to understand this perfectly integrated whole of God. He cannot actually be sub-divided into His attributes as though they were divisible parts.

“God exists in Himself and of Himself. His being He owes to no one. His substance is indivisible. He has no parts but is single in His unitary being. The doctrine of the divine unity means not only that there is but one God; it means also that God is simple, un-complex, not made of parts, one with Himself. The harmony of His being is the result not of a perfect balance of parts but of the very absence of parts. Between His attributes no contradiction can exist. He need not suspend one to exercise another, for in Him all His attributes are One. All of God does all that God does; He does not divide Himself to perform a work, but works in the total unity of His being.”

A. W. Tozer; *The Knowledge of the Holy*; p. 15

God is Not:

1. God is **Not** a summation of His attributes:
Sovereignty + Mercy + Wrath + Omnipotence + Just + Holy + Perfect + Jealous + Loving + Eternal + Wise + Omnipresent + Omniscient + Omniscient + etc.
2. God is **Not** a core of being with attributes attached to Him:



God is:

- God is entirely and perfectly Merciful
- God is entirely and perfectly Wrathful
- God is entirely and perfectly Holy
- God is entirely and perfectly Righteous
- God is entirely and perfectly Loving
- God is entirely and perfectly Sovereign
- God is entirely and perfectly Jealous
- Etc., etc., etc.

Categorical Discussions:

Is this an Existential or a Relational Category? God's Simplicity is an **Existential category**. Simplicity is an essential and primary of His nature. In a sense, it is not really an attribute, but rather an essential nature of all of His attributes as being just one.

Is this an Incommunicable or a Communicable Category? God's Simplicity is primarily an **Incommunicable category**. Simplicity is not shared fully with humans. Incommunicable attributes are by nature not experienced by humans and therefore harder to relate to or to fully understand and yet this attribute does touch on human responsibility.

We are called by God through His Scripture to have integrity. Not to have our various parts inconsistent with one another. These are to be integrated and consistent with one another (simplicity).

James 1:5-8 *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Problem Statement: In the church today, there is a serious lack of understanding of this attribute of God. I have heard it said by laymen, authors, and church leaders that God's primary attribute is love, arguing that His wrath or justice or sovereignty is subordinate to His love. This leads to a weak and erroneous theology of who God is. It leaves us with no ability to comprehend this life and the problem of evil that we encounter routinely in this life.

II. Logic and Importance of God's Simplicity

Often when we speak of a person whom we admire and trust we say they have integrity. By that we mean that they are integrated. They are consistent in their nature and in their resultant behavior. They, in a very small way, mimic God's majestic simplicity.

The opposite of integrated would be to be "divided", or to be "inconsistent", to be easily or readily "changeable" or "mutable".

A related attribute of God that we can readily understand is that God is "immutable", meaning that He is unchangeable, and that He is "unified".

Verbal Expressions of Divine Simplicity:

- When any divine attribute is expressed, it is expressed in a way that is not contradictory to, but rather is qualified by all of His other attributes.
- God must be merciful in a way that is consistent with His righteousness, wrath, love, and justice.
- Every act of God is conditioned by all of His attributes simultaneously.
- God is omniscient, not just in exemplifying omniscience, but rather by Being omniscient. This is His nature! This omniscience is a fundamental result of who He is in all of His other attributes.
- God is identical to each and all of His attributes, just as He is identical with His nature.
- God is immutable and without any deficiency. His attributes must be completely perfect and consistent with each other. There are no "bad" attributes of God. They are all good, and holy, and just, and loving.
- God cannot be sub-divided into different parts. If God were less in any of His attributes, then He would not be God.
- His Being contains every possible element of perfection and completeness.

III. The Scriptural Basis of God's Simplicity –

Some verses pertinent to our knowing of God's Simplicity:

Deut 6:4-9 *"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

1 Cor 8:4-6 *Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. ⁵For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.*

James 2:18-20 *But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." ¹⁹You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. ²⁰But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*

Rom 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ^{Is 40:13} ³⁵Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ^{Job 35:7} ³⁶For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

Based on the doctrine of God's simplicity, we are to understand that the "one" in these verses applies not only to the number of God, but to the nature of this God as being One in the consistency of His nature. This God is perfect and complete in His essence (His attributes). He is not divisible. His attributes never conflict with one another.

God's attributes are each one perfect and complete. They do not compete with one another. They never conflict with one another. This is not true of we created ones. We are **not** perfectly and completely integrated. We live lives of contradiction and chaos with our nature which is a composite of attributes based on many inconsistent things.

When we say that God is "Love", we can (and must) certainly add to that each and every one of His other attributes. E.g. God's love is holy, and just, and righteous, and immutable, and perfect, and eternal, and glorious, and providential, etc., etc.

IV. Theology of the Early Church

The Athanasian Creed: a central truth of:

"The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son: not made nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding."

V. Important Points About God's Simplicity

1st How God's Simplicity Relates to Other Attributes

God's Simplicity relates to all of His other attributes by definition. They are part of His whole essence. God is fully and perfectly integrated in His nature. He has no conflict in His person or essence. No one attribute stands alone or above in importance over all the other.

2nd Why God's Simplicity is Important to Our Faith

To understand who God is, is essential to our faith. We act on what we believe. Therefore what we believe is essential to our ability to in some small way relate to God, obey Him, and to worship Him. If there is some important misunderstanding of who God is, there is an opportunity for idolatry of the mind.

3rd Confessions or Creeds that Address God's Simplicity

Belgic Confession starts with: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God."

1689 London Baptist Confession – "- a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, -" Chapter 2; 1st paragraph.

A number of other confessions refer to this attribute by saying that God is "without parts".

(e.g. 1742 Philadelphia Confession)

4th Heresies that Deny God's Simplicity

Every cult or heresy that denies God's transcendence also effectively denies God's simplicity. Certainly:

- **Mormons**, God is a material being with size and dimension, certainly not transcendent Spirit.
- **Deists**, God is denied immanence and true relational personhood.

- **Theological Liberalism** (mainstream Protestants) is based on Materialism and/or Naturalism. and
- **Many present-day Evangelical** churches, ministers, and church members through ignorance due to the failure of the teaching ministry of the church are largely ignorant of the attributes of God and in particular of **His majestic Simplesness**.

VI. The Necessity of Theological Grounding to Properly Worship God.

“For Christians, the glorification of God both in personal meditation (or study) and communal worship requires that we have a correct understanding of God’s attributes. This is why correct theology will be found behind sound worship. In fact, constructing a correct theology, a correct **theoria*, a correct “beholding” of God, is the prerequisite for the body of Christ to worship God adequately. Otherwise, the word God tends to be the name of an idol we have made and does not refer to the Yahweh of the Bible.

- - - It is not enough to believe in God – the kind of God we believe in determines the kind of worship we give.”

**Theoria* Greek θεωρία) is Greek for contemplation (literally, to view or witness, to behold something as a spectator).

Important Quotes About God’s Simplicity

“Rather, we must remember that **God’s whole being includes all of His attributes**: He is entirely loving, entirely merciful, entirely just, and so forth. Every attribute of God that we find in Scripture is true of all of God’s being, and we therefore can say that every attribute of God *also qualifies every other attributes.*”

Wayne Grudem; *Systematic Theology*; p. 179

“We must maintain a carefully balanced perspective as we pursue our study of God's love. God's love cannot be isolated from His wrath and vice versa. Nor are His love and wrath in opposition to each other like some mystical yin-yang principle. Both attributes are constant, perfect, without ebb or flow. God Himself is immutable - unchanging. He is not loving one moment and wrathful the next. His wrath coexists with His love; therefore, the two never contradict. Such are the perfections of God that we can never begin to comprehend these things. Above all, we must not set them against one another, as if there were somehow a discrepancy in God. God is always true to Himself and true to His Word (Rom 3:4; 2 Tim 2:13). Both God's wrath and His love work to the same ultimate end - His glory. God is glorified in the condemnation of the wicked, and He is glorified in the salvation of His people. The expression of His wrath and the expression of His love are both necessary to display His full glory. Since His glory is the great design of His eternal plan, and since all that He has revealed about Himself is essential to His glory, we must not ignore any aspect of His character. We cannot magnify His love to the exclusion of the other attributes.”

John MacArthur; *The God Who Loves*; p. 18

... “**The simplicity of God** not only prevents us from ranking certain attributes higher than others, it allows God to have "a distinct and infinite life of His own within Himself". He is not an abstract Absolute idea who happens to have love, wisdom, and holiness, as if we first conceive of a being called God and then relate qualities to Him. Rather, God in His very essence - within Himself and by Himself - is love, wisdom, and holiness. God is whatever He has. He is not the composite of His attributes, some in greater and some in lesser amounts. **God is a simple being without parts or pieces.** His attributes do not stick to Him; He is what they are.”

Kevin DeYoung; *Theological Primer: The Simplicity of God*, a blog found on the “Monergism” web site.

“I think it might be demonstrated that almost every heresy that has afflicted the church throughout the years has arisen from believing about God things that are not true, or from overemphasizing certain true things so as to obscure other things equally true. To magnify any attribute to the exclusion of another is to head straight for one of the dismal swamps of theology; and yet we are all constantly tempted to do just that.”

A. W. Tozer; *The Knowledge of the Holy*; 1961 ed. p. 85