

Lecture 4- The Doctrine of God

Prayer

Let us therefore bow before the majesty of our good God, recognizing the great number of faults and offenses with which we have provoked His wrath against us. Let us pray to Him that He may etch the fear of His majesty upon our minds and make us sharers in those things that we have learned in the Scripture, that by His strength He may support our weakness and infirmity, and may make us victors by the power of His Spirit, and provide sufficient strength for us to withstand any temptations to which we would otherwise be unequal, and run the whole course of our lives in obedience to Him, giving thanks to Him for His many and great benefits to us. Finally, that all our senses may be lifted up in worshipping Him to his everlasting praise and glory, and we may be led in the pathway of salvation, not for our own private advantage, but for the upbuilding of our neighbors. It's in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.

The Doctrine of God

I. Agreement Between What Creation and Scripture Teach Concerning God

- A. Knowledge of God had we not sinned
- B. Knowledge of God from creation through the Bible
 - 1. Existence and attributes of God
 - 2. Orderly government of the universe
- C. Knowledge of God from the Bible only
 - 1. Trinity
 - 2. Creation (angels and demons; man's original state)
 - 3. Full scope of God's particular providence

II. Characteristics of Calvin's Treatment of the Doctrine of God

- A. Stress on Scripture
 - 1. Not, "What is God?" but, "What kind of God is he?"
 - 2. God "not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us" (1, 10, 2)
 - 3. Warning against speculation (1, 13, 21)
 - 4. Knowledge of God "invites us first to fear, then to trust in him" (1, 10, 2)
- B. Stress on worship
 - 1. Acceptable worship (1, 11, 1) (Regulative principle)
 - 2. Unacceptable worship ("It is unlawful to attribute a visible form to God" title of 1, 11)
 - a. Use of images of God in worship
 - 1) Not allowed (1, 11, 12)
 - 2) Not worthy (1, 11, 6; 1, 11, 12)
 - 3) Not needed (1, 11, 7; 1, 11, 13)
 - b. Proper use of art (1, 11, 7)
 - 1) Histories and events
 - 2) Forms of bodies

III. Attributes of God

- A. "Special marks" — Eternity; Self-existence (1, 10, 2); and Infinity; Spirituality (1, 13, 1)
- B. Exodus 34:6, 7 and Psalm 145 (Attributes present "so to speak in solution rather than in precipitate" — Warfield)
- C. Fatherly sovereign/sovereign Father

IV. Worship (1, 11-12)

- A. To lead us to know how to worship God
- B. Rejection of RCC and EOC use of images in worship of God

V. Trinity

- A. Special mark by which God is distinguished from idols

- B. We don't know God apart from a trinitarian knowledge of Him
- C. Background: trinitarian debates with Carolli, Gribaldi, Servetus
- D. Terminology
 - 1. Value of terms such as "persons" and "trinity"
 - a. We need not confine ourselves to the exact words of the Bible
 - b. But avoidance of traditional language may indicate a "secret poison"
 - 2. Freedom to formulate doctrine independent of the traditional statements
- E. Statements (1, 13, 5; 1, 13, 20)
- F. Arguments — in the unity of the Godhead, there are distinctions ("subsistences") of persons
 - 1. The Son is God (1, 13, 7–13)
 - 2. The Holy Spirit is God (1, 13, 14 & 15)
 - 3. God is one, but there are distinctions in the Godhead (1, 13, 16–20)
 - a. But there is a distinction: Father — "beginning," "fountain;" Son — "wisdom," "counsel," "ordered disposition of all things;" Spirit — "power and efficacy of that activity"
 - b. Gregory of Nazianzus (1, 13, 17)
- G. Defense
 - 1. Justification of polemics (1, 13, 21)
 - 2. Defense of the doctrine of the trinity against the anti-trinitarians
- H. Evaluation
 - 1. "Notes" of Calvin's conception of the trinity — "simplification, clarification, equalization" (Warfield)
 - 2. Equalization
 - a. Consubstantiality of the persons — that whatever the Father is as God, the Son is as God, and the Holy Spirit is as God
 - b. "Self-existence" of the Son
 - 1) The Son, as Son, exists of the Father
 - 2) The Son, as God, exists of Himself
 - a) "God from God"
 - b) Eternal generation

See Appendix C

For Further Study

Warfield, B. B. "Calvin's Doctrine of God" and "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity"