

## Summary of Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of God

Herman Bavinck, a prominent Reformed theologian, provides a comprehensive and profound exploration of the doctrine of God in his work "Reformed Dogmatics." Bavinck's treatment of the doctrine is deeply rooted in the classical Christian tradition, yet he engages critically with contemporary philosophical and theological developments. Here are the key themes and concepts Bavinck discusses regarding the doctrine of God:

### 1. Knowledge of God

- **Revelation:** Bavinck emphasizes that our knowledge of God is based on His self-revelation. This revelation occurs through general revelation (nature and conscience) and special revelation (Scripture and the incarnation of Christ).
- **Faith and Reason:** He maintains that faith and reason are complementary in knowing God. While reason can grasp certain aspects of God's existence and attributes, faith is essential for a fuller, more intimate knowledge of God.

### 2. Attributes of God

- **Incommunicable Attributes:**
  - **Aseity:** God's self-existence and independence from creation.
  - **Immutability:** God's unchangeable nature and constancy in His being and attributes.
  - **Infinity:** God's transcendence over all limitations, including time (eternity) and space (omnipresence).
  - **Simplicity:** The unity and indivisibility of God's essence, meaning He is not composed of parts.
- **Communicable Attributes:**
  - **Spirituality:** God is a spirit, without a physical body.
  - **Knowledge:** God's perfect and exhaustive understanding of all things.
  - **Wisdom:** God's perfect ability to use His knowledge to achieve His purposes.
  - **Goodness:** God's benevolence, mercy, and love.
  - **Holiness:** God's absolute purity and separation from sin.
  - **Righteousness:** God's justice in upholding His moral law.
  - **Sovereignty:** God's supreme authority and governance over all creation.

### 3. The Trinity

- **Unity and Diversity:** Bavinck affirms the classical doctrine of the Trinity, emphasizing both the oneness of God's essence and the distinctiveness of the three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).
- **Economic and Immanent Trinity:** He distinguishes between the economic Trinity (God's actions in history and salvation) and the immanent Trinity (the eternal relations within God Himself).

- **Relational Nature:** The relational dynamics within the Trinity (perichoresis) highlight the perfect communion and love shared among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

#### 4. God's Decrees

- **Eternal Plan:** Bavinck explains that God's decrees are His eternal plans and purposes, encompassing all that comes to pass.
- **Sovereignty and Human Responsibility:** He maintains a balance between God's sovereignty in predestination and human responsibility, rejecting deterministic fatalism while affirming divine providence.

#### 5. Creation and Providence

- **Creation:** Bavinck asserts that God created the world ex nihilo (out of nothing) and that creation is a free act of God's will.
- **Providence:** God's continuous involvement in and governance over creation, ensuring that His purposes are fulfilled. Bavinck discusses both general providence (God's care for the universe) and special providence (God's care for His people).

#### 6. The Problem of Evil

- **Theodicy:** Bavinck addresses the problem of evil, acknowledging its mystery but affirming God's goodness and justice. He argues that God permits evil for a greater purpose and ultimate good, which is often beyond human understanding.

#### 7. Covenant Theology

- **Covenant of Works and Grace:** Bavinck places significant emphasis on God's covenants as the framework for His relationship with humanity. The covenant of works (with Adam) and the covenant of grace (through Christ) are central to understanding God's redemptive plan.

#### 8. God's Glory and Worship

- **Glory:** Bavinck concludes that the ultimate purpose of all God's actions is His own glory. Everything in creation and redemption serves to magnify His greatness.
- **Worship:** Human beings are called to respond to God's revelation and actions with worship, adoration, and obedience, reflecting the glory of God in their lives.

## Summary of John Calvin on the Doctrine of God

John Calvin, one of the principal figures of the Protestant Reformation, offers a detailed and systematic exposition of the doctrine of God in his seminal work, "Institutes of the Christian Religion." Calvin's theology is marked by a profound reverence for the majesty and sovereignty of God. Here are the key themes and concepts Calvin discusses regarding the doctrine of God:

### 1. Knowledge of God

- **Natural Revelation:** Calvin asserts that the knowledge of God is evident in the created world. Nature testifies to God's existence, power, and divinity (Romans 1:20). However, this knowledge is insufficient for salvation.
- **Special Revelation:** The Scriptures provide the fuller and clearer revelation of God necessary for salvation. Calvin emphasizes the importance of the Word of God as the primary means by which God reveals Himself to humanity.
- **Knowledge of God and Self:** Calvin famously begins his "Institutes" by stating that true knowledge consists of knowledge of God and of ourselves. He argues that understanding God's holiness and majesty leads us to a true understanding of our own sinfulness and need for grace.

### 2. Attributes of God

- **Incommunicable Attributes:**
  - **Aseity (Self-Existence):** God exists in and of Himself, independent of anything else. He is the source of His own being.
  - **Immutability (Unchangeableness):** God is unchanging in His nature, will, and promises. He is consistent and faithful.
  - **Eternity:** God is eternal, having no beginning or end. He exists outside of time.
  - **Omnipresence:** God is present everywhere, fully and completely, at all times.
  - **Simplicity:** God is not composed of parts; His essence is undivided.
- **Communicable Attributes:**
  - **Holiness:** God is perfectly pure and separate from sin.
  - **Justice:** God is perfectly righteous and just in all His dealings.
  - **Mercy:** God shows compassion and mercy towards His creation.
  - **Love:** God is love, and His love is evident in His actions towards humanity.
  - **Wisdom:** God's wisdom is perfect, and He governs all things with purpose and understanding.

### 3. The Trinity

- **One Essence, Three Persons:** Calvin upholds the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, affirming that God is one essence in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **Distinct Persons:** Each person of the Trinity is distinct but not separate. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial.

- **Economic and Immanent Trinity:** Calvin distinguishes between the economic Trinity (how God reveals Himself and acts in history) and the immanent Trinity (the eternal and internal relationship within the Godhead).

#### 4. Sovereignty of God

- **Providence:** Calvin emphasizes God's absolute sovereignty over all creation. God's providence means that He upholds, governs, and directs all things according to His will.
- **Predestination:** Calvin teaches that God has eternally chosen some to salvation and others to damnation, based on His sovereign will and for His glory. This doctrine is meant to provide assurance to believers of God's unwavering purpose and love.

#### 5. Creation and Providence

- **Creation:** God created the world out of nothing (ex nihilo) by His word and for His glory. All of creation reflects His power and majesty.
- **Providence:** God not only created the world but also continuously sustains and governs it. Nothing happens by chance; all events are under God's sovereign control.

#### 6. The Problem of Evil

- **God's Sovereignty and Human Sin:** Calvin acknowledges the mystery of how God's sovereignty coexists with human sin and responsibility. He insists that God is not the author of sin, yet He permits and uses it for His purposes.
- **Purpose in Suffering:** God uses suffering and evil to accomplish His divine purposes, ultimately for the good of those who love Him and for His glory.

#### 7. Covenant Theology

- **Covenants:** Calvin places significant emphasis on the covenant as the framework of God's relationship with humanity. The covenant of works (with Adam) and the covenant of grace (through Christ) are central to understanding God's redemptive plan.
- **Continuity of the Covenants:** Calvin teaches that the covenant of grace is administered differently in the Old and New Testaments but is essentially one covenant.

#### 8. Glory of God

- **Chief End of Man:** Calvin asserts that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Every aspect of a believer's life should be directed towards the glory of God.
- **Worship:** True worship involves reverence, obedience, and adoration of God. Calvin emphasizes the importance of worshipping God according to His revealed will.

#### 9. Prayer

- **Means of Grace:** Prayer is a vital means of grace, through which believers communicate with God, express their dependence on Him, and align their wills with His.
- **Elements of Prayer:** Calvin outlines the elements of true prayer: reverence for God, recognition of our needs, confession of sins, and gratitude for God's mercies.

## Westminster Catechism on the Doctrine of God

The Westminster Catechism, comprising the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism, is a key doctrinal standard for many Reformed churches. It provides a detailed and systematic teaching on the doctrine of God, emphasizing His attributes, nature, and works. Here's a summary of what the Westminster Catechism teaches about the doctrine of God:

### 1. The Nature of God

- **Question 4 (Shorter Catechism):** "What is God?"
  - **Answer:** "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."
- This succinct statement highlights several key attributes of God:
  - **Spirit:** God is immaterial and not confined to a physical body.
  - **Infinite:** God is limitless and boundless in His nature and attributes.
  - **Eternal:** God exists beyond and outside of time, having no beginning or end.
  - **Unchangeable:** God is immutable, meaning He does not change in His essence, purposes, or promises.
  - **Attributes:** God's attributes include being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

### 2. The Trinity

- **Question 6 (Shorter Catechism):** "How many persons are there in the Godhead?"
  - **Answer:** "There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory."
- **Question 9 (Larger Catechism):** "How many persons are there in the Godhead?"
  - **Answer:** "There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties."
- This teaching emphasizes:
  - **Unity of Essence:** The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the same divine essence.
  - **Distinct Persons:** Each person of the Trinity is distinct yet fully and equally God.
  - **Equality:** Each person is equal in power and glory.

### 3. God's Attributes

- The catechisms elaborate on God's attributes, underscoring both incommunicable and communicable attributes:
  - **Incommunicable Attributes:** Attributes that are unique to God, such as aseity (self-existence), immutability (unchangeableness), and infinity (eternity and omnipresence).
  - **Communicable Attributes:** Attributes that God shares to some degree with humans, such as wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

#### 4. God's Works

- **Creation:**
  - **Question 9 (Shorter Catechism):** "What is the work of creation?"
    - **Answer:** "The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good."
- **Providence:**
  - **Question 11 (Shorter Catechism):** "What are God's works of providence?"
    - **Answer:** "God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions."
- This emphasizes God's sovereign control over the universe, His ongoing involvement in creation, and His sustaining power.

#### 5. The Decrees of God

- **Question 7 (Shorter Catechism):** "What are the decrees of God?"
  - **Answer:** "The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."
- **Question 12 (Larger Catechism):** "What are the decrees of God?"
  - **Answer:** "God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of His will, whereby, from all eternity, He hath, for His own glory, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men."
- This teaching highlights God's eternal and sovereign will in predestining all events for His glory.

#### 6. God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

- The Westminster Catechism maintains a balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility:
  - God's sovereign decrees do not negate human responsibility; rather, they establish the context within which human freedom operates.

#### 7. The Glory of God

- **Question 1 (Shorter Catechism):** "What is the chief end of man?"
  - **Answer:** "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever."

- This foundational question and answer set the stage for understanding all of theology as oriented towards the glory of God and the enjoyment of His presence.