Category 1: The Character and Nature of God

Season 22 Monument Release



Directions: Work through the source material in this download to help you understand this week’s selection of apologetics prompts. This release addresses approximately 5% of the total number of prompts you will need to be prepared for in your next tournament, so keep up the studying from week to week to ensure your knowledge in Apologetics. This week’s prompts are:

1. What does it mean that God is triune? Why is this important?
2. What does it mean that God is omniscient? Why is this important?
3. What does it mean that God is omnipresent? Why is this important?
4. What does it mean that God is eternal? Why is this important?
5. What is the meaning of the sovereignty of God? Why is this important?
6. Christians often argue for God’s existence by suggesting the universe needs an initial cause. But what caused God?

Define: Trinity *by Zach Seals*

What does it mean that God is triune? Why is this important?

Bible Verses[[1]](#footnote-1)

*There is only one God* (Deut 6:4, Isaiah 43:10, Ps 86:10, Romans 3:30, James 2:19)

*The Father is God* (Matt 6:28-30, Rom 1:17, Gal 1:1)

*The Son is God* (Col 2:9, Phil 2:6, Hebrews 1:3)

*The Spirit is God* (Acts 5:3, Acts 28:25-27 quoting Isaiah 6:9-10)

*The Father is not the Son* (Matt 3:16-17)

*The Son is not the Spirit* (John 14:16, 15:26)

*The Spirit is not the Father* (Matt 28:19, 2 Thes 2:13)

Quotations

*To defend against:*

* “How can God be one and three at the same time? It is absurd, rationally impossible, and mathematically wrong. Unity and Diversity cannot gather together.” -Shabir Ahmad Usmani, The Noble Qur’an
* “No area of Jewish literature could be more inhospitable to the Christian doctrine of a triune godhead than the Hebrew Bible.” –Tovia Singer, Hebrew Rabbi
* “In fact, the God of the Bible is never described as being part of a Trinity.”[[2]](#footnote-2) -Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witness)
* “The trinity is three separate Gods. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That these three are separate individuals, physically distinct from each other, is demonstrated by the accepted records of divine dealings with man.” –James Talmage, Articles of Faith (Mormon)

*For defense:*

* “If Jesus’ relationship to the Father could be adequately described and accounted for in other terms than those of Trinitarian doctrine, the case for that doctrine would be lost. It can only be defended if the Trinitarian concept of God can be shown to be the only adequate and fully explicit expression of the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ.”[[3]](#footnote-3) - Wolfhart Pannenberg
* “No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of anyone of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.”[[4]](#footnote-4) - Gregory Nazianzus

Recommendations

*The Deep Things of God* by Fred Sanders

*The Forgotten Trinity* by James White

Commentary

In discussing such a foundational doctrine to Christianity it would be easy to find and delve into one of the numerous beautiful theological routes available in Trinitarian theology. Here it is helpful to remember that we can limit our approach specifically to address how one might criticize the Trinity. Usually, one needs to go no further than a simple mention of the doctrine to provoke questions about its logical coherency and so it is with its definition that the speaker’s defense must begin.

*Definition:*As Christians that are committed to the sole primacy of biblical revelation in our ascriptions about God’s nature a tension quickly arises between the drive of reason to define our understanding and the constraints demanded by Scriptural data. We must confess to believe and hold to only what Scripture affirms, that is, there must be a sense in which the Trinity is biblical. Yet, we also must admit the doctrine is nowhere *explicitly* stated within its holy pages. Furthermore, there is no subject more vastly removed from our own experience or being then the being of God, so the sheer ontological difference between the Creator and the creature should ease the speaker’s tone into an attitude of humility and awe. With this in mind, it’s important to begin the answer to the question of definition with the admittance of ultimate inadequacy. On this point clarity is essential. This is *not* to say that our language is totally insufficient in describing who God is, but rather that it in no sense is comprehensive. Look to history and the fourth century theologian Gregory of Nazainzus wisely reminds us to at no point think that our use of linguistic precision somehow exhaustively describes God. No matter how biblical, the Trinity should not be described as some sort of comprehensive model for the divine Godhead. Nonetheless, that is not to say it is totally inadequate. Gregory encourages the theologian to use biblical verses to constrain our theological models and determine our word choice in how we talk about the divine. As a highly trained philosopher, Gregory wants to use robust metaphysical categories in his description of the Trinity, and while this is appropriate, it is only because he is using the Scriptures to constrain and direct his philosophy rather than vice versa.

This understood, it could most clearly be stated that the Trinity is biblical in a strong inferential sense. That is to say, there is no one clear and explicit statement on the Trinity but it is rather deduced from a number of separately formulated doctrines.[[5]](#footnote-5) For example, the truth that there is only one God is explicitly stated in passages like Deuteronomy 6:4. Yet, the doctrine of Christ’s divinity is also explicitly seen in John 20:28. So on one hand there is only one God, and yet on the other we know that Christ is God. These are only two of the seven doctrines that make up the Trinity, but the point is that it is derived and then put into combination with other doctrines rather than explicitly made on its own. The Trinity is clearly biblical, then, in the sense that it is woven into the very fabric of the entire Bible. It does not need to be stated explicitly because it assumes it naturally throughout its corpus. Of course, this means in the course of one’s speech it should not even be attempted to walk through each statement and provide biblical support for it. It’s crucial for the speaker to remember here that the goal is not to *prove* or even *demonstrate* that Scripture teaches the Trinity, but rather helpfully define it based on the biblical warrant.

Equipped with the biblical data already listed then, theologians throughout the centuries of the Church have historically agreed upon the following crucial distinction: nature/essence and person. To speak of a nature/essence is simply a universal term that refers to a kind of being.[[6]](#footnote-6) For example, you are a human being/essence that consists of one person. Conversely, “God” is one divine essence that consists of three distinct persons. Each person does not have their own divine essence, but rather each share the same singular divine essence. Additionally, it is not being implied by referring to “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” that there is any ontological inequality. Due to each person fully existing in the same divine essence it cannot be said, like Arias or Origen, that somehow Jesus or the Holy Spirit are “less” God in any way. To be clear in the definition then, Louis Berkhof succinctly states what has been said above as the following “God is one in His *essential* being, but in this one being there are three persons, called, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These persons are not, however, like so many persons among men three entirely separate and distinct individuals. (Emphasis mine)”[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Significance:*Here the critic may aptly respond, “Why go through such philosophic work? Why can’t it simply be the case that God is one person that expresses himself in different ways?” A brief sketch then is required of the numerous ways in which the Bible assumes a core doctrine of the Trinity in its revelation of other teachings.

Salvation *–* It is an utterly clear biblical principle that the payment for sin is death and the punishment is due to the humans that committed it. If a human were to step forward to atone for all of humanity’s sins, it would be impossible for him or her. For a mere human could not receive punishment for more than his/her own crimes due to their own finitude. It was necessary then that the Savior be fully God, an infinite being, to truly save us from our sin. Additionally, Scripture presents deliverance from sin in a sacrificial context where a third party is required to “offer up” the sacrifice (Hebrews 9:12). Biblically then, it is entirely necessary that salvation be from God (Jesus), to God (Father), and through God (Holy Spirit), which requires three distinct persons sharing the divine essence equally.

God’s Revelation *–* Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:11, “For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” Interpreting this verse in a non-Trinitarian seems impossible. How else can the Holy Spirit accurately reveal God’s written or prophetic word unless he is God’s own Spirit? The Holy Spirit must be coequal with God or else he would be in no position to know God’s thoughts, and thus, Scripture would not be fully divine. Or what if Jesus is not fully God? The impact to our view of God’s revelation would be tremendous for he is supposed to be the exact image of God (Heb 1:3) and those that see him “see the Father” (John 14:9).

Divine Attributes *–* It’s been a core tenet of classical theism, and I would argue biblical Christianity, that God is wholly self-sufficient and relies upon nothing outside of him to be who he is (Exodus 3:14). C.S. Lewis takes this understanding and combines it with an analysis of love that leads to a fascinating argument for at least a multi-personal God. The argument is simple really. Love is, at its center, other-oriented and to be its truest must be directed outside of one’s own person and towards another. If God is love (1 John 4:8) and has been eternally, then long before man and angels were created who was he eternally loving? The answer of Scripture is the Trinity (John 17:23). What makes this even more beautiful is that man has no right to think of himself as the reason that God is love. God does not *need* our love in any way (Acts 17:25), and yet he still wants it. It also follows from the Trinity that we can be assured of divine love not just from the Father, but from the Son and Spirit as well. In fact, this can be applied to all of God’s attributes. One need not worry if one person of the Trinity makes a promise if the other will fulfill it. The same love that has been incredibly expressed by the Son in his sacrificial death is also held by the Father and the Spirit in their work.

*Approaching the Speech:*Remember, this is not the time to walk through seven different verses and build an inferential biblical case for the Trinity. Recall that these kinds of questions should not be approached in a vacuum. They will arise naturally in any honest yet critical conversation and that’s a good thing. By beginning the speech with reference to one’s own limited capacity to comprehend explain God’s nature, and yet not denying the accuracy by which we can speak about it, the first interaction the judge will hear will be humility. From there, quote the difficulties many various religions and skeptics have with the Trinity and address them by providing the nature/essence and person distinction provided above. Seeing as logical coherence has been defended (although conceivability is still challenged), the rest of your time is left to unpacking some of the suggested ways above that makes up the core of Christianity. This is the perfect time to be personal and share how believing in a Tri-personal God with one fundamental unity of nature changes the way you live and see the world every day. For the Christian, there is no fundamental tension between Unity and Diversity as the great Eastern religions struggled with for centuries. The Trinitarian God is beautifully and uniquely *personal,* while still maintaining monotheism,above all other conceptions of him, and this should provoke hearts to worship and praise.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Define: Omniscience *by Luis Garcia*

What does it mean that God is omniscient? Why is this important

Bible Verses

[1 Samuel 2:2-3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+2%3A2-3&version=NIV)

[1 Kings 8:39](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Kings+8%3A39&version=NIV)

[Job 21:22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+21%3A22&version=NIV)

[Psalm 139:1-16; 144:3-4; 147:5](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139%3A1-16%3B+144%3A3-4%3B+147%3A5&version=NIV)

[Proverbs 5:21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+5%3A21&version=NIV)

[Isaiah 40; 55:8-9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+40%3B+55%3A8-9&version=NIV)

[Matthew 6:33-34; 10:30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A33-34%3B+10%3A30&version=NIV)

[Romans 11:33-34, 36](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+11%3A33-34%2C+36&version=NIV)

[Hebrews 4:13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+4%3A13&version=NIV)

[James 1:5](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+1%3A5&version=NIV)

Quotations

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” –Corrie Ten Boom

“The knowledge of God may be defined as *that perfection by which He, in an entirely unique manner, knows Himself and all things possible and actual.* This knowledge is inherent in God and is not obtained from without. Moreover, it is always complete and stands out clearly in the consciousness of God. It is called *omniscience*, because it is all-comprehensive.” –Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*

Recommendations

<http://carm.org/dictionary-omniscience>
<http://www.thegracetabernacle.org/quotes/God-Omniscience.htm>

Commentary

When approaching this card, consider the idea of how nothing goes past the sight of God. In that, there are two responses of two people groups in reacting to God’s Omniscience:

One, believers are able to find complete rest and refuge. If God knows all things, what are we to worry about? God’s Omniscience is intimate. In His knowledge of tomorrow, we can rest and do what needs to be done today. All of our past has been washed and is no longer a source of condemnation. Therefore, by God’s Omniscience, His children are able to fully trust in His leading, knowing He knows best.

Two, unbelievers find complete restlessness and conviction. If God knows all things, the past guilt and transgressions are before His sight and are listed as crimes according to God’s law. Therefore, no matter how much they try to fool the people around them, God penetrates the persona. All who are not under His grace are under His justice and are accountable to Him for every thought, feeling, and deed. (See also [Jeremiah 17:9-10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+17%3A9-10&version=NIV)).

Define: Omnipresence *by Katie Burdett*

What does it mean that God is omnipresent? Why is this important?

Bible Verses

[Jeremiah 23:23-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+23%3A23-24&version=NIV)

[Psalm 139:7-10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139%3A7-10&version=NIV)

[1 Kings 8:27](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Kings+8%3A27&version=NIV)

[Isaiah 66:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+66%3A1&version=NIV)

[Deuteronomy 4:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+4%3A7&version=NIV)

[Matthew 28:19-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+28%3A19-20&version=NIV)

[Psalm 23:4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23%3A4&version=NIV)

[Joshua 1:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+1%3A9&version=NIV)

[Revelation 21:3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21%3A3&version=NIV)

[Amos 9:1-4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Amos+9%3A1-4&version=NIV)

[Psalm 16:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+16%3A11&version=NIV)

[Hebrews 10:32-34](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+10%3A32-34&version=NIV)

Quotations

“God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.” – Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

“We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God.” – C.S. Lewis

“When you wish to do something evil, you retire from the public into your house where no enemy may see you. Wherever you shall have fled, there he is. There is no place at all wither you may flee. Will you flee from him? Flee unto him.” – Herman Bavink, *The Doctrine of God*

“We must be, whether we will it or not, as near to God as our soul is to our body. This makes it dreadful work to sin; for we offend the Almighty to his face, and commit acts of treason at the very foot of his throne. Go from him, or flee from him we cannot: neither by patient travel nor by hasty flight can we withdraw from the all surrounding Deity.” – C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*

“Should we be commanded on the most distant errand, we may assuredly depend upon the upholding right hand of God as with us in all mercy, wisdom, and power. The exploring missionary in his wanderings is led, in his solitary feebleness he is held. Both the hands of God are with his own servants to sustain them.” – C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*

Recommendations

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 11

C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, commentary on Psalm 139, <http://www.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps139.htm>

Stephen Charnock, *Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God*, Discourse VII, <https://archive.org/stream/discoursesupone01char#page/362/mode/2up>

Commentary

God’s omnipresence is not a difficult doctrine to either define or to defend, but it is a crucial part of an accurate understanding of the God of the Bible. Make sure to discuss ways in which God’s presence can be experienced in different ways (to sustain, bless or punish, for example). But much of your time should be spent talking about the implications of this truth. What does God’s presence mean for unbelievers? Why does it matter to the people of God? What does it mean when you are tempted to sin? What does it matter when you are walking through a season of suffering? How does God’s presence provide motivation and grace to do difficult things and to make choices that mean sacrificing good things for the sake of better things? God’s omnipresence is a great confidence in the midst of unknowns or difficult seasons. The assurance that God will never leave nor forsake his people is a precious one indeed.

Define: Eternality *by Katie Duffy*

What does it mean that God is eternal? Why is this important?

Bible Verses

Psalm 90:2

Job 36:26

Revelation 1:4-8

Psalm 90:2-4

Acts 17:30-31

Galatians 4:4

Exodus 34:6-7

1 Kings 8:56

Romans 8:32

Psalm 84:11

Quotations

“God has no beginning, end or succession of moment sin his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.” – Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

“God was, when nothing else was. He was God when the earth was not a world but a chaos. If God himself were of yesterday, he would not be a suitable refuge for mortals. The eternal existence of God is here mentioned to set forth, by contrast, the brevity of human life.” – Charles Spurgeon

“Let us observe that his [God’s] eternity and his self-existence are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated.” – John Calvin, commenting on Exodus 34:6-7 in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

“This being is in no sense made, nor did he ever come into existence; but he has existed from eternity, and will continue to exist for ever and ever.” – Melito of Sardis

Recommendations

*Discourse On the Eternity of God*, by Stephen Charnock

Excerpted from “Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God” by Stephen Charnock: <http://www.puritansermons.com/pdf/charnc11.pdf>

*Systematic Theology*, by Wayne Grudem, chapter 11, pages 168-173.

Commentary

When addressing the issue of the eternality of God, it is essential to emphasize that God’s eternality is the foundation for everything else that is true of him in Scripture. He cannot be Creator if he is not eternal. He cannot be unchanging if he is not eternal. He cannot be sovereign if he is not eternal. Our hope in the salvation of Christ only continues if God is eternally able to bring about the promises of his covenant with us. If God is not eternal, then the foundation that is laid in Scripture for belief is not trustworthy. The eternality of God is a great hope in the midst of trials and struggles, in the midst of a struggle for holiness, in the midst of a broken and dying world.

Furthermore, God, in his eternity has chosen to act within time for the good of his people and the sake of his glory. Make sure to discuss how God’s eternity interacts with our experience of time. God, in his eternal knowledge of all things, chooses to act in time, in the right time, by sending his Son, and by bringing the fulfillment of his promises. Though his timing rarely aligns with ours, the doctrine of his eternality guarantees his trustworthiness in all things, and ensures us that his will do the best thing at the best time.

Define: Sovereignty of God *by Zack Seals*

What is the meaning of the sovereignty of God? Why is this important?

Bible Verses

*Over Nature & Weather:*[Ps. 104; 105:16; 135:7; 147:7-20; 148](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps.+104%3B+105%3A16%3B+135%3A7%3B+147%3A7-20%3B+148&version=NIV); [Job 9:5-10; 26:5-14; 37:1-24; 38:8-38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+9%3A5-10%3B+26%3A5-14%3B+37%3A1-24%3B+38%3A8-38&version=NIV); [Mk. 4:39, 41](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mk.+4%3A39%2C+4%3A41&version=NIV)

*Kings & Nations:*

[Daniel 1:2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+1%3A2&version=NIV), [2:37-38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+2%3A37-38&version=NIV); [4:25,30,32](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+4%3A25%2C30%2C32&version=NIV); [5:18, 20, 21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+5%3A18%2C+20%2C+21&version=NIV); [Isaiah 10:5-13; 40:23-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+10%3A5-13%3B+40%3A23-24&version=NIV)

*People & their Hearts:* [Gn. 20:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gn.+20%3A6&version=NIV); [Prv. 21:1; 16:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Prv.+21%3A1%3B+16%3A9&version=NIV); [Ex. 3:21-22; 12:35-36; 34:23-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ex.+3%3A21-22%3B+12%3A35-36%3B+34%3A23-24&version=NIV); [Dt. 2:30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Dt.+2%3A30&version=NIV); [Josh. 11:20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Josh.+11%3A20&version=NIV); [Acts 4:27-28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+4%3A27-28&version=NIV); [2 Cor. 8:16-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Cor.+8%3A16-17&version=NIV); [Rv. 17:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rv.+17%3A17&version=NIV)

*Evil in General:* [Gn. 50:20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gn.+50%3A20+&version=NIV) (cf. [Ps. 105:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps.+105%3A17&version=NIV)); [Ex. 4:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ex.+4%3A11+&version=NIV) (disease & disability); [Job 2:10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+2%3A10&version=NIV) (cf. [Js. 5:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+5%3A11&version=NIV)); [Ps. 115:3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps.+115%3A3&version=NIV); [Prv. 16:33; 21:31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Prv.+16%3A33%3B+21%3A31&version=NIV); [Is. 45:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Is.+45%3A7&version=NIV); [Lam. 3:37-38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lam.+3%3A37-38&version=NIV); [Dn. 4:32, 35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Dn.+4%3A32%2C+35&version=NIV); [Am. 3:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Am.+3%3A6&version=NIV); [Mt. 10:29-31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mt.+10%3A29-31&version=NIV); [Acts 4:27-28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+4%3A27-28&version=NIV); [Eph. 1:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Eph.+1%3A11&version=NIV); [2 Cor. 12:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Cor.+12%3A7&version=NIV)[[8]](#footnote-8)

Quotations

“This is the essence of God’s sovereignty; His absolute independence to do as He pleases and His absolute control over the actions of all His creatures. No creature, person, or empire can either thwart His will or act outside the bounds of His will.” - Jerry Bridges, Author

“Sin cannot dethrone God. That is what sin aims to do, but it misses its mark. Sin brings guilt to a man, but it does not bring him one ounce of sovereignty. God rules even when men imagine they are defying Him.” - Tom Well*s*, Author

“What is fate? Fate is this - *Whatever is, must be.* But there is a difference between that and Providence. Providence says, *Whatever God ordains, must be;* but the wisdom of God never ordains anything without a purpose. Everything in this world is working for some great end. “ - C.H. Spurgeon, 19th century Pastor

Recommendations

*Is God Really In Control* by Jerry Bridges; *Four Views on Divine Providence*, Counterpoints Zondervan; *The Providence of God* by Paul Helm; *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J.I. Packer; *The Sovereignty of God* by A.W. Pink; *The Many Faces of Evil* by John Feinberg

Commentary

As is evident from the Scriptures above, there is a wealth of options one can take with this topic theologically.  It must be remembered however, the task at hand is apologetic in nature.

*Definition:* It must always be the apologist’s goal to make clear that their beliefs are derived from the Bible first and foremost, rather than defined by men and then found in the Scriptures. The most helpful way of doing this is to begin by briefly summarizing the list of verses given above. Pick at least one from each category above and quickly cover the breadth of God’s sovereignty by explaining each verse. One succinct definition of sovereignty that John Feinberg provides is “sovereignty can be defined as God’s power of absolute self determination”.[[9]](#footnote-9) That is to say when the biblical data is examined it is observed that nothing determines God’s choices other than his own nature and purposes. God’s sovereignty is self-determining which therefore means it is entirely free and unconstrained by human choices. Additionally, God’s sovereign will is entirely efficacious and cannot be thwarted by any creaturely will. Everything that he plans will come about (Ps. 115:3). The grounds of this universal sovereignty are in God’s absolute ownership of all that he has created (Ps. 50:10), including humans (Prov. 21:1, 1 Sam. 2:6).

*The objection:*Naturally, the tension arises how this comprehensive view of sovereignty allows for human free will. The problem, it is commonly assumed, is that if God is the one ultimate influencing the decisions of the human heart than a man’s choices are not ultimately left up to him and therefore he is not morally responsible. Without getting into too much detail,[[10]](#footnote-10) this objection assumes a particular view of freewill that renders the biblical definition of the sovereignty of God given above incompatibile with moral responsibility. Theologically speaking, there are two ways one can define human freewill. It is either *compatible* with God’s determining of future events[[11]](#footnote-11) through human choices (call this theological determinism) or it is *incompatible* with God’s determination. Many incompatibilists argue that freewill is incompatible with any kind of determinism because it is necessary to have the ability to do otherwise in order for an action to be free. They would say, for example, the speaker’s choice to address the question on the sovereignty of God in their speech instead of another option presented is because *all factors being considered* (including God’s intentions and efforts) they had the equal ability to choose this particular subject or some other topic presented. This idea is called the principle of alternative possibilities and is widely popular in the American culture today.[[12]](#footnote-12) Basically, it claims an action is only free, and therefore morally responsible, when alternative possibilities are equally available at the time of the choice. God’s sovereignty in human actions as presented in the prior section rules out the principle of alternative possibilities. There then seems to be an inherent conflict either with our formulation of God’s sovereignty or with the philosophical view of freewill that appears so intuitive.

*Answering the objection and thus showing the significance of God’s sovereignty:*The closest Biblical explanation that can be given in resolving this age old dilemma is to deny the incompatibilist view of freewill stated above and affirm a view of freewill called *compatibilism.* Numerous texts in the bible teach that man’s actions are determined by the desires of their heart[[13]](#footnote-13) and that their actions will flow from their heart. “Freewill” then is not about having the ability to do otherwise but rather a “free” will is one that is able to act in accordance with its desires. What’s so important about this definition is that it allows for both man to be free and therefore morally responsible for his actions and yet also have their actions determined by God. The best example of this in the Bible is found in Isaiah 10. In this chapter God is using the wicked nation of Assyria to bring judgment on his own people Israel and the way he does so has fascinating insights into the Biblical view of moral responsibility and freewill. In describing the king of Assyria’s actions in v. 5-6, the author makes it clear that it is because of *God’s* action that the king is acting the way he is. Yet, incredibly, in v. 12 God says he will still judge the arrogant king of Assyria as guilty of having a prideful heart. Shockingly, in v. 15 God goes on to compare the king as a simple tool that he can use to bring about his purpose and yet still be justified in judging the king for having a wicked heart!

One must be clear there this is picture is nothing like the common caricature that this view makes humans out to be robots who simply receive divine commands with no will of their own. Quite contrary to this picture man is responsible precisely because he is doing what he wants to do in following his will/heart even if that state of the heart was, in some sense, intended by God. Of course, there is no use in speculating as to the exact mechanics of how this divine causation works in the human heart because it would be so unlike any level of human causation there would be no way of comparing. Rather, the response should be the same of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:35 that “all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” At the end of the day, man has no right to question God’s authority to rule in the way he does or judge and hold us accountable for our actions in the way he does. This is a wonderful release of control for the human mind to rest in knowing that God is totally able to rule without hindrance from his subjects. Jerry Bridges pastorally notes that “If God is not sovereign in the decisions and actions of other people as they affect us, then there is a whole major area of our lives where we cannot trust God; where we are left, so to speak, to fend for ourselves.”[[14]](#footnote-14) A.W. Pink also notes, “What is God’s remedy for dejection at apparent failure in our labours? This–the assurance that God’s purpose cannot fail, that God’s plans cannot miscarry, that God’s will must be done. Our labours are not intended to bring about that which God has not decreed.” Of course, this should never lead one to a passive life of complacency. That mindset flows from an unbiblical fatalism[[15]](#footnote-15) rather than a careful balance between God’s action and man’s responsibility. Finally, Paul argues in Ephesians 1 that the very purpose of God working all things according to the counsel of his will is because it will then be brought to “the praise of his glory” (v. 14). May the Christian find sweet praise in knowing that God can and will use all means possible to make His name gloriously known throughout this earth in both the just punishment of the wicked and the salvation of the undeserving.

What Caused God *by Alisa Stringer*

Christians often argue for God’s existence by suggesting the universe needs an initial cause. But what caused God?

Bible Verses

Genesis 1:1

Exodus 3:14-15

Job 38-39

Psalm 90:1-2

John 17:1-5

Romans 1:20

1 Corinthians 2:7

Revelation 1:8

Quotations

“Our Maker exists in an eternal, self-sustaining, necessary way—necessary, that is, in the sense that God does not have it in Him to go out of existence, just as we do not have it in us to live forever. We necessarily age and die, because it is our present nature to do that; God necessarily continues forever unchanged, because it is His eternal nature to do that. This is one of many contrasts between creature and Creator.” – Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs[[16]](#footnote-16)

Recommendations

Summa Theologica by Thomas Aquinas[[17]](#footnote-17)

Saint Thomas Aquinas was one of the most influential theologians of the medieval church. In his Summa Theologica, Aquinas addresses the major arguments that can be presented to the Christian faith. He then systematically disproves the objections to Christianity through use of philosophy, theology, and logic. While the entire work is well worth apologists’ time, question two article three is particularly pertinent to answering the question of “What caused God?”

Divine Aseity and Apologetics by John M. Frame[[18]](#footnote-18)

This short article provides a nice introduction to the terminology and idea of aseity. Theologian John M. Frame provides a framework for the importance of self-existence as an essential characteristic of God. He also introduces readers to the ideas of the theologian Cornelius Van Til, who is famous for his groundbreaking work in presuppositional apologetics.

Commentary

The most famous theological argument refuting the idea that something or someone caused God can be found in Saint Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica. According to Aquinas, the problem of what caused God is inherently cyclical in nature, because God is self-existent. “If in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity there will be no first efficient causes, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God” (Aquinas 26). In the efficient cause argument, Aquinas broadly defends the fact that God exists. The logic does not dictate who God is, but rather that a being exists that can rightfully be called God. One of the defining characteristics of the being called God is that He is the initial cause. If any other being caused God, then that being that was caused is not God, and the being who caused is, by definition, God. The modern term for this characteristic is aseity, defined by Oxford English Dictionary as “Underived or independent existence.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

Everything that we experience can be summarized in the rule of cause and effect. Actions have results. If we gradually add heat to water it boils, and if we sign up for speech events we are assigned to competition rooms. Because our understanding of the world is so fundamentally based on cause and effect, we naturally struggle with the idea that anything could exist outside of its cause. It is therefore natural that we should ask ourselves, “What caused God?” There is a systemic problem that underlies this line of questioning. We are limiting God to our understanding of the universe. Because we cannot exist outside of cause and effect, we assume that God cannot. This is one of the most dangerous pitfalls that we can stumble into. We, who are created in the image of God, attempt to define God in our image. Yet we ought to remember the praises from Psalm 147:4-5, “He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.”

Our limitations are not God’s. Perhaps the best reminder of God’s glory can be seen in the book of Job, where God Himself responds to Job. “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” Where Job is limited in time and understanding, God is not. God always has been and always will be. As Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible explains, “God’s existence is assumed from the first verse of Genesis.” The Old Testament begins with the words, “In the beginning, God.” In other words, at the point where time is initiated, at the point when cause and effect began, God already existed. God is the creator and the “I Am.” Where we are finite, we can rest in the knowledge that God is infinite.

1. Wisely,Fred Sanders reminds us that when thinking about seeing the Trinity in Scripture “its really about “how” its revealed rather than the “subject” of what’s revealed. God isn’t “revealing” the Trinity directly but rather having conversations or “revealing” other things in a Trinitarian way.” When reading the following verses think about how you might be “listening in” on Trinitarian conversations and perhaps providentially “overhearing” about the nature of God. Also, far from exhaustive the verses listed simply represent my personal recommendations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. www.jw.org [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Christian Vision of God: The New Discussion on the Trinitarian Doctrine,” Trinity Seminary Review (1991): 53-54 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Orations 40.41, as quoted by Robert Letham, The Holy Trinity, 378 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See the list of verses and seven statements listed above. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Taken from John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (2001), pg. 487 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, Eerdmans, 2001, pg. 75-76 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I have modified this list originally found here: http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/the-sovereignty-of-god [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Although if the reader is interested, Feinberg has an excellent discussion of this subject in his magnificent work *No One Like Him.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Eph 1:11, Acts 4:27, 2 Corinthians 12:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Thaddeus Williams thorough analysis of this view and how prevalent it is in society in *Love, Freedom, and Evil*. (2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Proverbs 4:27, Ezekiel 36:26, and Luke 6:45 to name a few. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Trusting God*, 1988, p. 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See the Spurgeon quotation above. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Packer, J.I. Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs. Tyndale House, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologica. Random House, 1948. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Frame, John. “Divine Aseity and Apologetics.” http://reformedperspectives.org/articles/joh\_frame/VT\_Divine%20Aseity%20and%20Apologetics.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Aseity.” Oxford English Dictionary, 1989, 2nd edition. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11420?redirectedFrom=a-seity#eid [↑](#footnote-ref-19)