

The God Who Is

Exodus 3:1–15, John 8:51–59

This is the fifth in a series of messages on Shorter Catechism 4, “What is God?” The answer is memorable and useful: “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” We have considered “God Is a Spirit,” “God Is Infinite,” “God Is Eternal” and “God Is Unchangeable.” Today we consider God’s “being”: “The God Who Is.”

Being is defined as *the quality or state of having existence*. Here is the difference between “the God who *is*,” contrasted with all the false gods of the nations, who *aren’t*—who don’t exist! The Psalmist’s maxim is apropos: “For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens” (Ps. 96:5). The LORD who made the heavens is real—he *exists*—whereas, the gods of the peoples are *idols*: “worthless idols” (ESV). Why are they worthless? Because they do *not* exist! They cannot hear or answer prayer, they cannot protect, they cannot save. This is a significant difference indeed! This is not the difference between a Ford and a Chevrolet, or a Democrat and a Republican. Some people have strong opinions about cars, or about politics; they will wax eloquent about why they prefer a Ford over a Chevy, or *vice versa*. But when it comes to God, we’re not talking about the difference between two gods who both *exist*, who have power to save, who can answer prayer—one “Brand A” and the other “Brand B.” No! There is only one God who exists, who is real. False idols exist only in peoples’ imaginations.

Our text for exposition and application this morning is Exodus 3:14. This is one of the most important texts in the whole Bible. Let us consider the context, then we’ll look at three points of application. As the chapter opens, Moses, son of a Hebrew slave, raised in Pharaoh’s palace, has been tending his father-in-law’s flocks in the Sinai Desert for 40 years. As he goes about his work, “the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush.” Moses “looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. . . . Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’”

Notice what’s happening here: the “Angel of the LORD”—the angel of *Yahweh*—appears to Moses, yet in the very next verse we read that “when the *LORD* saw that he turned aside to look, *God* called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’” Amazingly, the angel of the LORD is called “the LORD” and “God.” In the words of Calvin, “he not only calls himself Jehovah, but claims the glory of the eternal and only God.” Here, then, is *Yahweh*, *Jehovah*, the God who *is*, assuming a visible form, so that he might be seen by Moses. There is mystery here. Moses did not see him in his *essence*—no human could possibly endure that. As the Lord would tell Moses in chapter 33, “You

cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” Moses did not see Yahweh in his *essence*, but “as the infirmity of the human mind could comprehend him.”¹ What we have here is a preincarnate appearance of the eternal Son of God. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 teaches that the covenant people in the wilderness “all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was *Christ*.” Think of what that means: there are not two separate and distinct peoples of God in the Bible, but one: one church, headed by Christ, the only king and head of his church. It was *Christ*, the only Mediator between God and man, who revealed the triune God to Moses in the desert. Moreover, Israel is positively identified as “the *church* in the wilderness.”² There is one church, composed of all God’s people in every age.

Moses was told to take off his shoes, for the place on which he stood was holy ground. In the presence of the God of heaven, even the soil under our feet becomes holy. Have you ever walked on hot sand in your bare feet? It can be downright painful. In Middle Eastern hospitality, guests remove their shoes or sandals when coming into a home. It was as if God had told Moses, “Take off your shoes and come into my holy tabernacle; sit down a minute and experience my presence. You need not be in any hurry to leave.” Moses was told to remove his shoes, so that he might listen with greater reverence to God. In the same way, when we come into the presence of God in worship, Christ is the unseen host. We are to sit at his feet, look up into his eyes and hear the instruction of his word. Our Catechism asks, “How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation? That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.”³ When we prepare for worship we should prepare both our bodies and hearts. As much as possible we should avoid being out late on a Saturday night, so that we can have a quiet evening, read the Bible, pray, prepare our heart and get a good night sleep, enabling us to arrive early and be ready for the call to worship the next morning. We should arrive for worship ready to concentrate on the holy task before us, not distracted by our hurried and hectic preparations.

The God of heaven told Moses, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Overcome with emotion at confronting the holiness of God, “Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.” Take a closer look at the Lord’s words: “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Calvin observes that God “does not merely proclaim himself as some heavenly power, nor claim for

¹ Calvin, Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses (Logos Bible Software)

² Acts 7:38 KJV. The Greek word is ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), the common NT word for *church*.

³ SC 90, <https://opc.org/sc.html> accessed 9-2-23

himself only the general name of God, but recalling to memory his covenant formerly made with the patriarchs, he casts down all idols and false gods, and confirms Moses in the true faith.” In other words, God does not identify himself merely as some generic non-offensive god that one might tip one’s hat to in a display of civic religion, such as singing “God bless America.” No, he reveals himself to the covenant people as the God who *is*, the living and true God.

Just this week I received a prayer request from a cousin of mine who lives in another part of the country. She said: “pray for my daughter Miriam and her husband Garth, who was raised Catholic. They both believe in God but are not believers.” What my cousin seems to mean is that her daughter and son-in-law believe in God in some vague, undefined way, but have not submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ and become his worshipers. Miriam and Garth are emblematic of the religious status of millions and billions of people: they believe in God in some generic, undefined way, but do not profess faith in the God of the Bible. Brothers and sisters, listen carefully: to believe in God in a vague, undefined way is not enough! As a matter of fact, to believe in a generic god who is *not* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who sent his Spirit into our hearts to enable us to cry, “Abba, Father,” will positively damn you! Let there be no mistaking: belief in a generic god, and not the God of the Bible, will *damn* you. If Jesus is who he says he is: “the way, the truth and the life”—the only way to the Father, the only Mediator between God and man—then there is no salvation apart from Christ. None! To turn your back on the God of the Bible brings eternal punishment.

We are considering the God who *is*, and we’re coming to the key text. This brings us to our first point: God is:

1. Self-existent

In verse 13 Moses asks, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” To which God responds: “I AM WHO I AM.” Ponder that for a moment: “I AM WHO I AM.” Here is one of the most distinctive and striking phrases in the whole Bible. God, who is wholly other—altogether distinct and apart from his creation, from anything in the created order—wants his church to meditate on his eternality. Significantly, he uses the present tense: “I AM.” As we established two weeks ago, God is eternal. He is not time-bound; he lives above time. He is not a created being; he has always been, and he always will be: “I AM WHO I AM.” He follows up with a phrase that is contrary to normal grammatical usage: “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God uses the first person of the verb *to be* as a substantive (a noun phrase), annexing it to a verb in the third person (“has sent”): “I AM has sent me to you.” Why does the Lord use this ungrammatical turn of phrase? Calvin hits the nail on the head: “that our minds may be filled with admiration as often as his

incomprehensible essence is mentioned.” Yes, that’s it: “that our minds may be filled with admiration as often as his incomprehensible essence is mentioned.” Here is the God who *is*, who exists, the God who gives existence to everything else: living, non-living, vegetable, animal, flora and fauna, angels and men. Here is the God who created everything that *is* by the word of his power—by simply speaking it into existence! We sometimes use the phrase “a self-made” man, but there actually is no such thing. You and I and everyone else owe our existence to the God who is. The atheist owes his existence to the God who is. Again, to cite the words of Calvin, “God attributes to himself alone divine glory, because he is self-existent and therefore eternal; and thus gives being and existence to every creature. . . . in order rightly to apprehend the one God, we must first know, that all things in heaven and earth derive at his will their essence, or subsistence from One, who only truly *is*.” Here is the root of the name Yahweh, God’s proper name. Yahweh (יהוה) is derived from the word הָיָה, which means *to be*. This is the word translated “the LORD” in our versions, using all caps, a word that occurs over 6,500 times in the Hebrew Bible! This is the name by which God, the God who *is*, chooses to identify himself. How significant that our Lord Jesus Christ in our New Testament text testifies to the Jews: “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” The Lord Jesus self-consciously used the phrase “I AM” in the presence of the Jews, asserting that he, the Messiah sent by God, is himself very God.

Application question: do you acknowledge and profess the God who *is*, the God before whom every knee—including yours—shall one day bow? Have you, by the Spirit’s help, received him as your own personal Savior? Have you acknowledged that you are a sinner with no hope of eternal life apart from Christ? Have you fled to him for mercy? His word promises: “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Can there be a greater promise than that: “shall be *saved*”—that is, saved from hellfire, brought into a right relationship with the God who gave us life, the God who sent his Son to save us? Why should you be saved? Because apart from him there is only eternal death: banishment from the comfortable presence of God, consigned to the realm of the dead: Satan and his horde of demons (fallen angels) for all eternity, where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth forever and ever. But the glory of the gospel is that the promise “shall be saved” is freely given to “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord.” That’s the only requirement: to call upon the name of the Lord: to realize that you cannot earn your own salvation; you can never be good enough. But if you call upon the name of the Lord, if you say to him, “I know that I am a sinner, I know I am unworthy of eternal life, but in response to your word I call upon you to save me; Lord, I love you, I need you, I cannot live without you; take me, I’m yours—forever,” then “you will be saved.” He will save you! O dear sinner, renounce your sin and become his worshiper. Jesus truly is “the life.” Amen.

Point one, then, is “Self-existent”: God is self-existent and gives life to all creatures. Second, God is

2. Triune

We have considered the *fact* that God exists. But *how* does he exist? The answer is that the God of the Bible exists in *trinity*—one in three: *one* God eternally existing in *three* Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is indeed a great mystery, but it is vitally important. This has been the teaching of the orthodox churches (small “o”) from the beginning.

The Nicene Creed, accepted by all three major branches of Christendom, clearly states: “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth . . . and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God . . . I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life . . .”—one God, three divine persons.

The Athanasian Creed, composed later, teaches: “This is the catholic faith: that we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity.” “One God in Trinity” is thus the belief of the one holy catholic (small “c”) church.

Our Shorter Catechism is in perfect agreement: “How many persons are there in the godhead? . . . 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.”⁴

Make no mistake: if *any* religion denies the trinity, or refuses to acknowledge the trinity, then its god is *not* the God of the Bible but a false idol that cannot save. Many Jews are thoroughly secular, but there are some who are very devout. The one thing all Jews have in common is a denial that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah. Judaism is widely regarded as one of the three great monotheistic religions. Jews worship one god, but it is not the God of the Bible, the God who is, the God who reveals himself in Holy Scripture: one God, eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen. Therefore, the god of Judaism is *not* the true God but a rival, a figment of human imagination.

In like manner the god of Islam is not the true God. Worshiping Allah is not worshiping the God of the Bible, the God who is, the God who reveals himself in Holy Scripture: one God, eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, the god of Islam likewise is *not* the true God but a figment of human imagination. There are many fine, well-meaning Muslims, but they need to be told that the God they worship is not the God of the Bible—something that is offensive to the true God who has revealed himself to man in the person of Christ.

The god of Unitarianism likewise is not the God of the Bible. Wikipedia calls Unitarianism a “Nontrinitarian branch of Christianity.” But there is *no* nontrinitarian branch of Christianity! Unitarians are not Christians. Unitarians

⁴ SC 6

“believe that Jesus Christ was *inspired* by God in his moral teachings and that he is the savior of humankind, but he is not . . . equal to God himself.”⁵ The god worshiped by Unitarians is not the true God, the God who *is*, but a figment of human imagination. Notable Unitarians include Edvard Grieg, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Priestley, Linus Pauling, Sir Isaac Newton, Susan B. Anthony, Florence Nightingale, Frank Lloyd Wright and Julia Ward Howe—talented, thoughtful, capable men and women who left their imprint upon Western culture—but unless the Holy Spirit of God changed their hearts before they breathed their last, they are separated from God and suffering the flames of eternal punishment, for they did not worship the true God but an idol. The true God is triune, one God in three divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is how he revealed himself, and it is a rejection of his word and person to say, “God, I don’t like you as you are; I prefer to conceive of you some other way.” We are called upon to love the God of the Bible, not a false god of our own imaginations.

We have seen the God is self-existent, and he is triune; thirdly, he is

3. Unparalleled

Our text concludes with the words “Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.”””

The Spirit of Christ, speaking to Moses out of the burning bush, reveals himself not as a new god, but as the God of the covenant that he had made with Abraham and his posterity: the LORD God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses is thus reassured that the same God who had entered into covenant with his father Abraham and his seed is speaking to him now. God has *not* forgotten his people who have been enduring suffering and enslavement and bondage in Egypt! God has been mindful of his people all along, *allowing them to experience enslavement so they will appreciate their freedom in Christ*: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”⁶ Here is the God who is without parallel, not like the idols of the nations who existed only for their own selfish pleasure, but the God of Scripture, who genuinely *cares* for his people, who comes down from heaven to deliver them from sin and bondage and bring them into a relationship with himself that continues into eternity future, when the saints will forever rejoice in the Lamb who took upon him their nature, who died and rose again, that they might have life eternal and abundant in the presence of him who loved them with an everlasting love. Yes, this God is without parallel, and he is worthy of our praise and love. His name יהוה is his memorial.⁷ The ESV

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarianism> accessed 9-2-23

⁶ John 8:36

⁷ Heb. זָכַר, construct of זָכַר, from the word זָכַר, *remember*

paraphrases: “This is my name forever, and *thus I am to be remembered* throughout all generations.” Brothers and sisters, God wants us to remember his covenant love forever and ever. There is no other God like him!

To recap: God is (1) self-existent, (2) triune, (3) unparalleled. This is the God who *is*. To him be all the glory. Amen.