

The Attributes of God



THE STUDY OF GOD'S
CLASSICAL ATTRIBUTES



God

Have you ever wondered ‘why’ people who believe in God describe “God” in certain ways? Well, it connects to the way they view God’s attributes!

Our Twelve
Attributes of God

Pure Act

Goodness & Will

Simple

Omnipresent

Immutable

Omnipotent

Eternal

Omniscient

Impassible

Immaterial

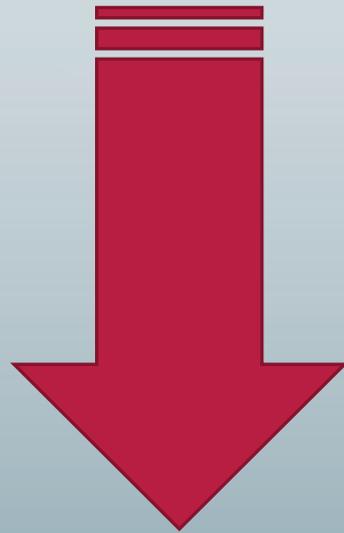
Infinite



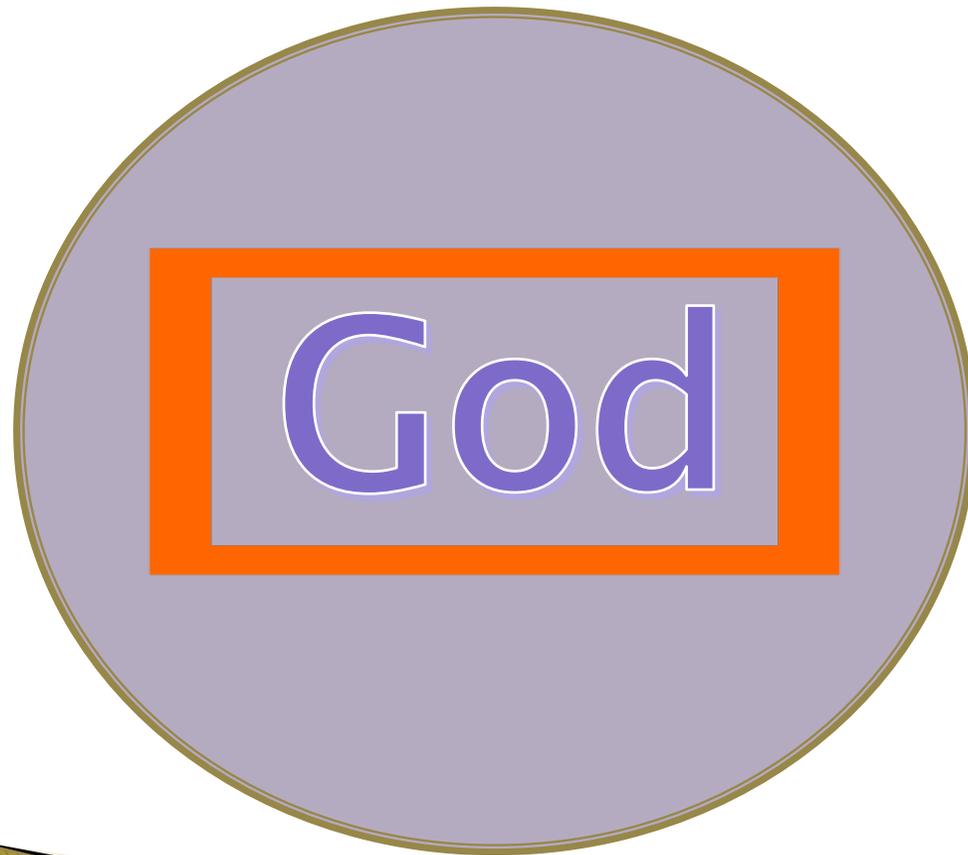
NOTE:



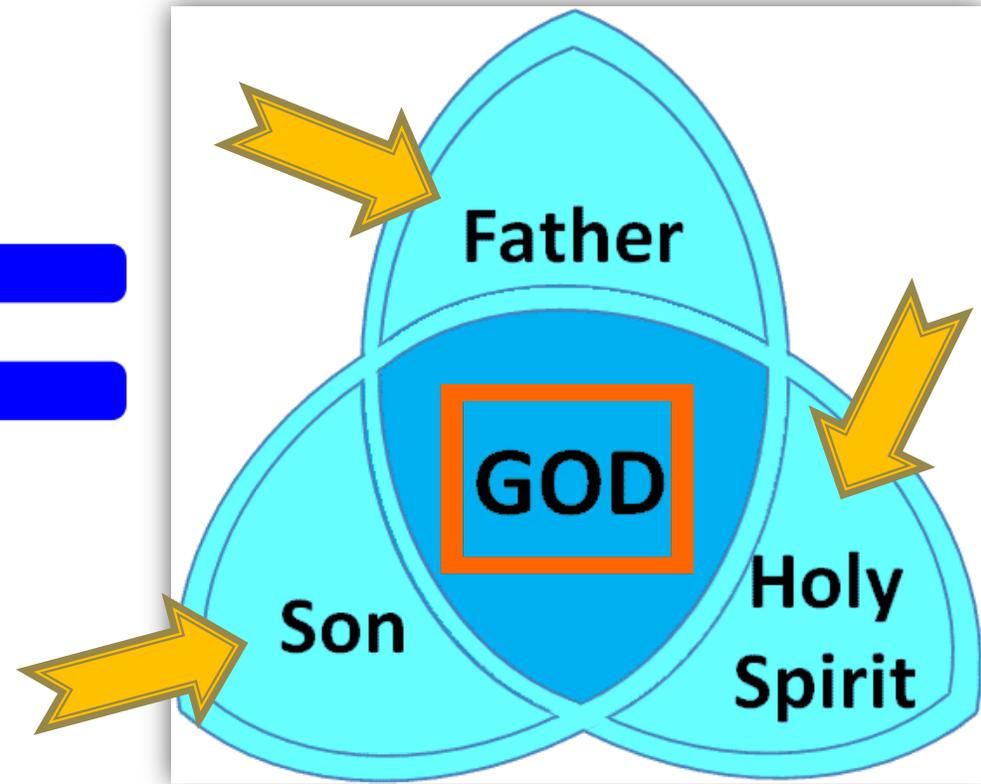
- We are discussing how classical theism has understood “God”; that is, ‘what is God’s *nature*?’ We are not talking about God in human flesh (incarnation of Jesus).



In Christianity, the picture of God is Triune, not Unitarian



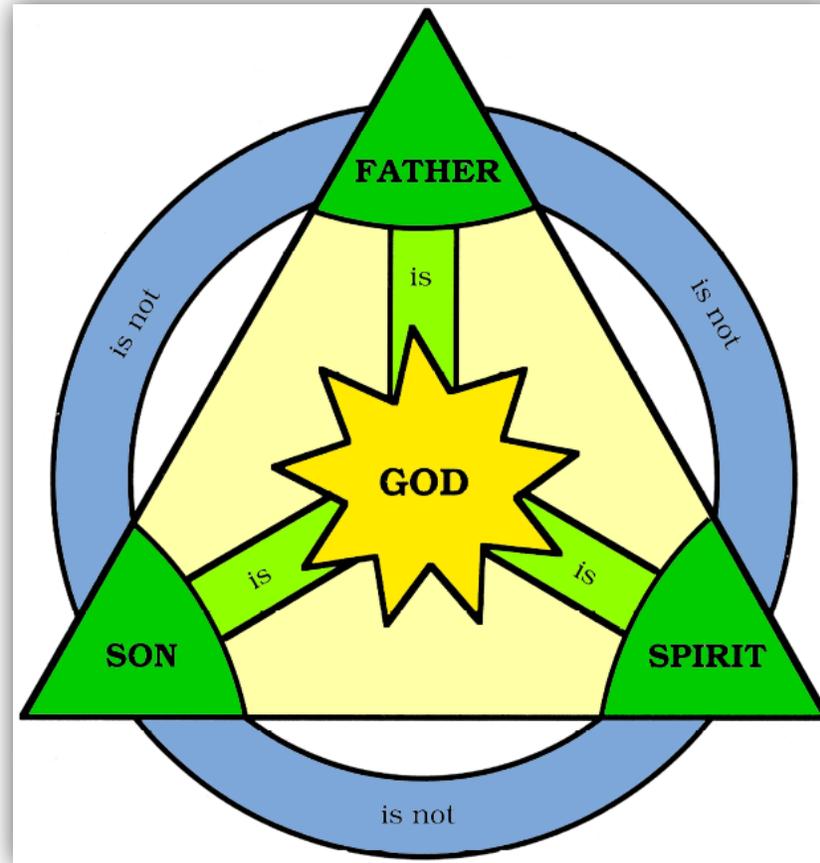
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What is the Trinity?

The
One
Essence

‘What’



The
Three
Persons

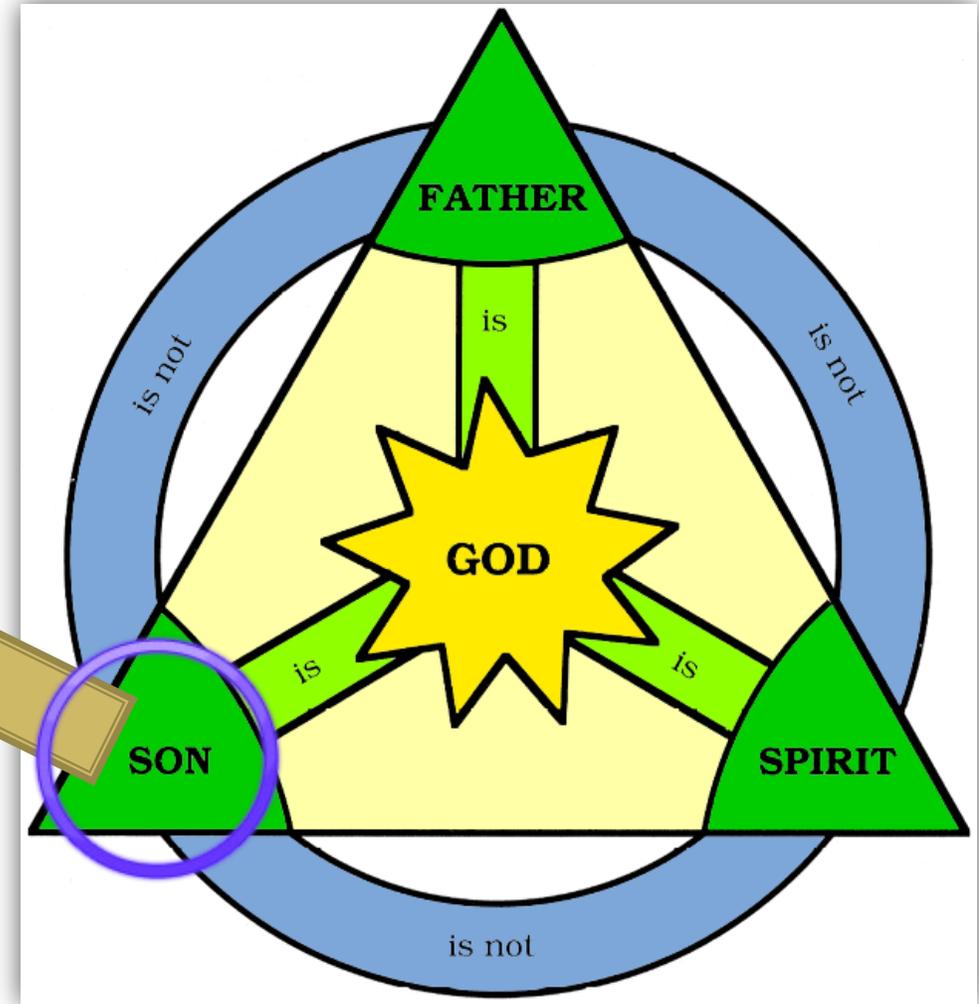
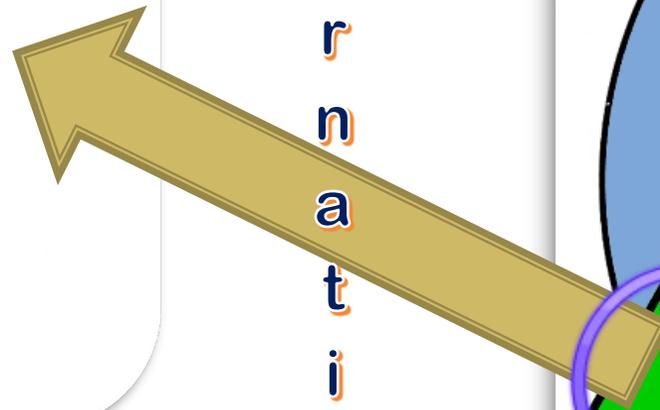
‘Who’

Who is Jesus in the Trinity?



The 'God-man'

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NOTE:

- We are discussing how classical theism has understood “God”; that is, ‘what is God’s *nature*?’ We are not talking about God in human flesh (incarnation of Jesus).
- We are discussing the classical attributes of a theistic God, since most of the common arguments for and against God are in reference to a theistic view of “God” (not the pantheistic, polytheistic, or animistic views of God[s]).

NOTE:

- I will provide objections to the attributes and give theistic responses to those objections.
- Due to time and the numerous attributes that we will be discussing, these topics will be in summary form of complex ideas. If you have questions, please ask...but try not to go down too many ‘rabbit-trails’ 😊

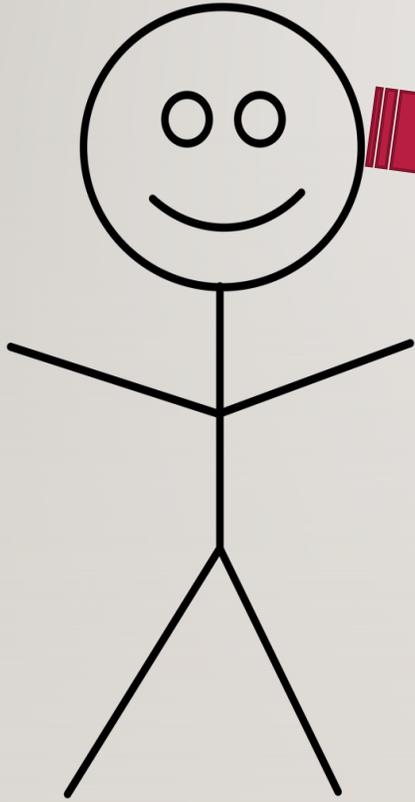


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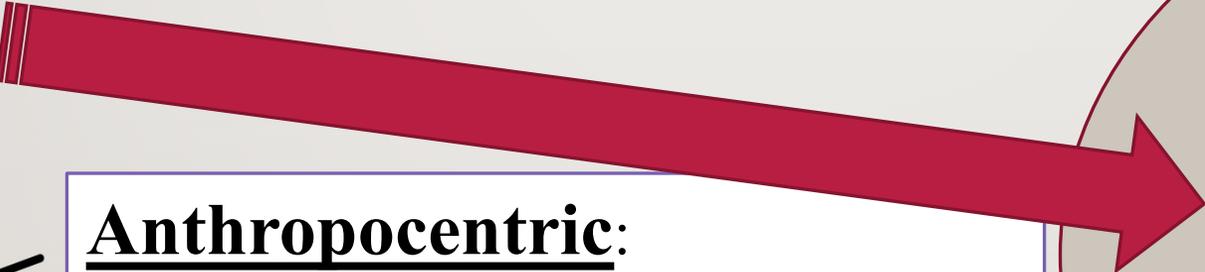
- This presentation will require you to take all of your skills you have ever learned about logic and theology and apply them to our study in the classical theistic view of “God”.
- This opening presentation is to prepare you for the endeavor to understand these attributes of “God”.

Anthropocentric vs. Theocentric



Anthropocentric:

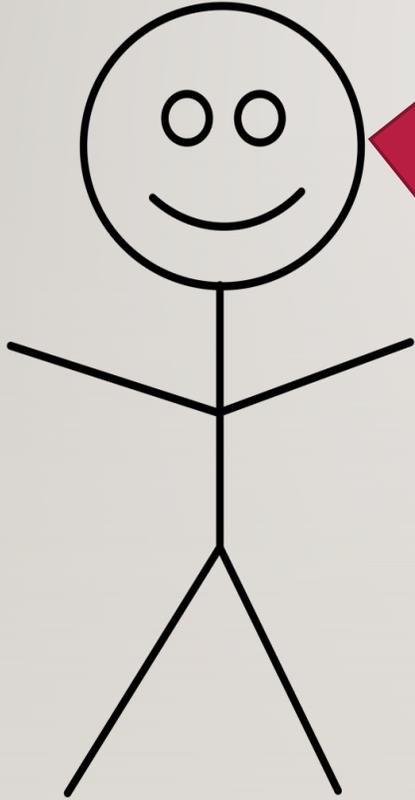
- This is a ‘human-centered’ perspective of life, time, and reality.
- Everything must fit humanity’s ideas rather than a divine-God’s perspective.



God

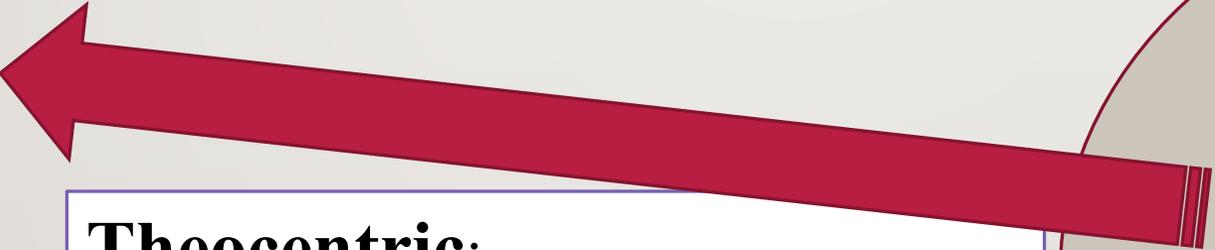
A large red arrow points from the stick figure towards the word 'God'. The word 'God' is written in a large, blue, sans-serif font with a white outline, centered within a large, light gray oval with a red border.

Anthropocentric vs. Theocentric



Theocentric:

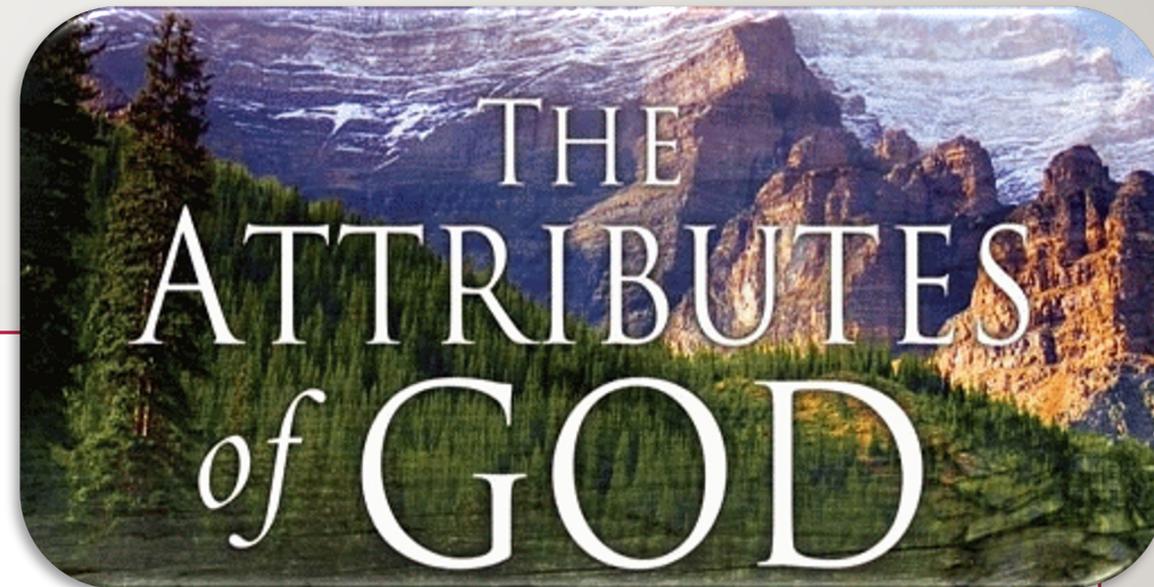
- This is a 'God-centered' perspective of life, time, and reality.
- Everything must fit a divine-God's ideas rather than humanity's perspective.



God

A large, light gray oval containing the word "God" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. A thick red arrow points from the oval towards the stick figure on the left.

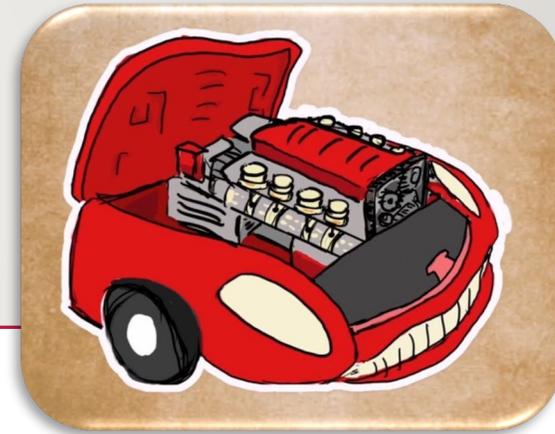
WHAT IS A DIVINE ATTRIBUTES?



- An “*Attribute*” is...
 - A characteristic that can be attributed to God’s nature;
 - Attributes give the term “God” a definition;
 - These attributes must all point to and refer to one and the same being;
 - An essential trait of God (i.e. Theology Proper).

What is Theology Proper?

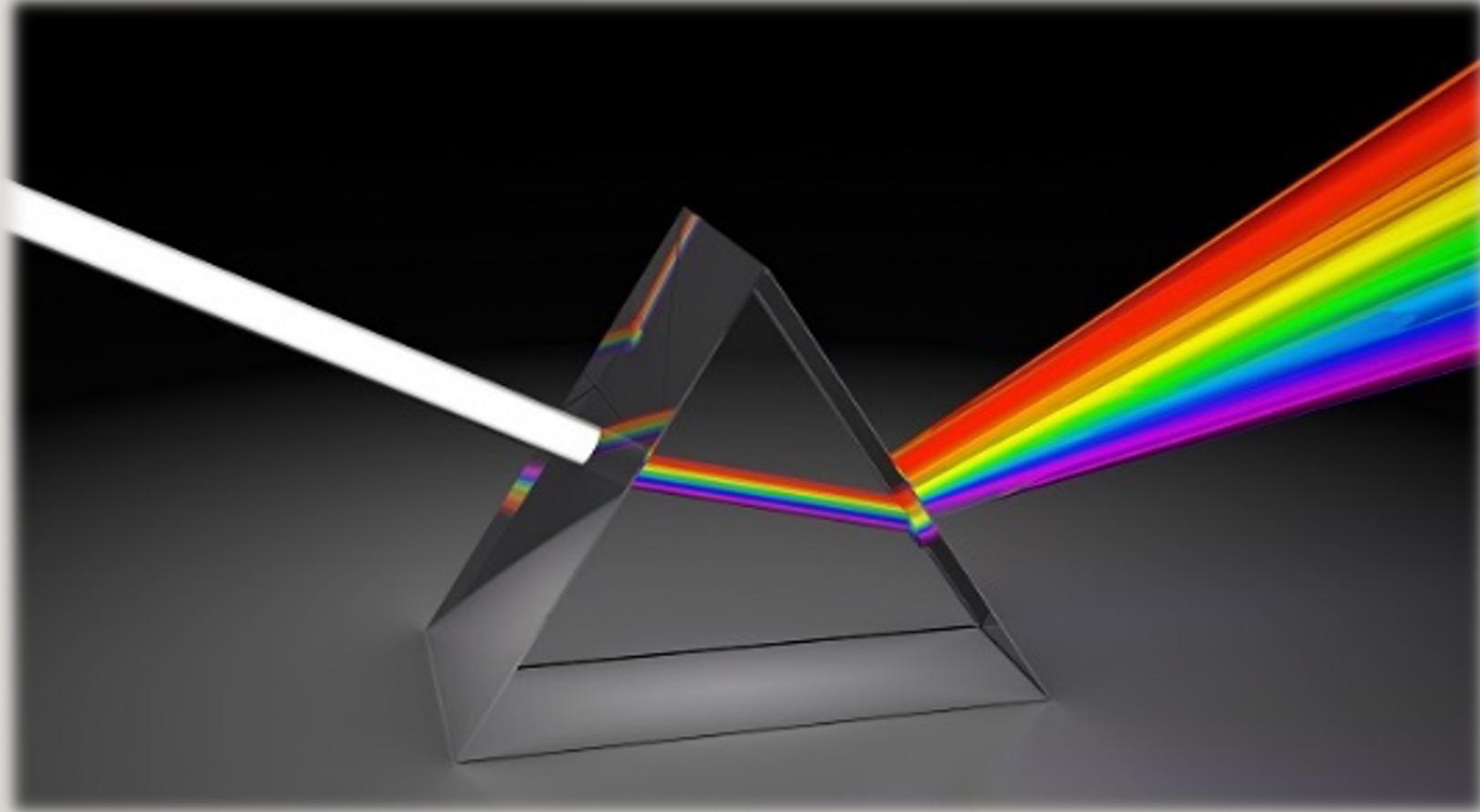
- God is the 'object' of study.
- The study of God's divine attributes.



Theology Proper



Analogy for the Divine Attributes of God



* * * God is whatever he has * * *

WHY STUDY DIVINE ATTRIBUTES?

- 1) All Basic Theological Truth Depends Upon God's Attributes
- 2) We Cannot Recognize False "gods" without Knowing the True God
- 3) Error has Practical Consequences (ideas have consequences)



WHY STUDY DIVINE ATTRIBUTES?

- 4) Our Spiritual Growth is Dependent Upon Our Concept of God
- 5) A Commitment to 'What is Less Than Ultimate' Will Not Be Ultimately Satisfying



What is Metaphysics?

Metaphysics = literally, 'beyond the physical'

- the study of reality
- the study of "being"

Metaphysics = What God is (in His essence)

Theology = What God does (in the Bible/world)



what exactly is
reality?

Why should I know something of Metaphysics?

As a Christian, you are a “Theist” (believe in one God)

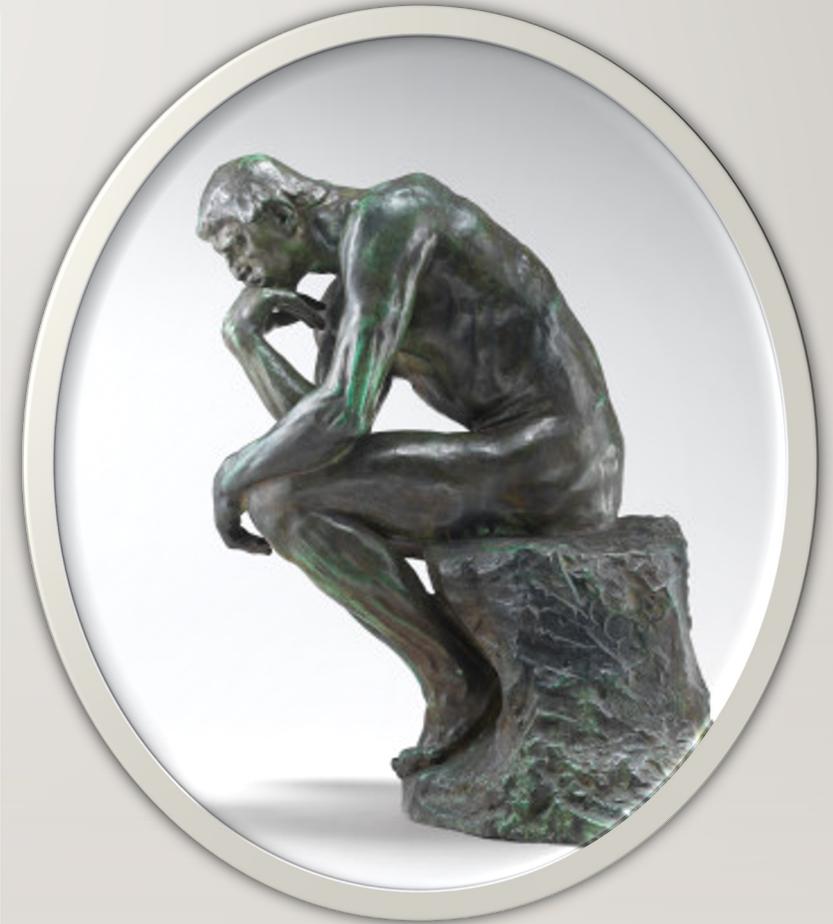
You are not a:

- Pantheist (God is the Universe)
- Panentheist (God is *in* the Universe)
- Polytheist (Many gods)
- Deist (God is beyond the Universe, but not involved in it)
- Atheist (No God in or outside of the universe)

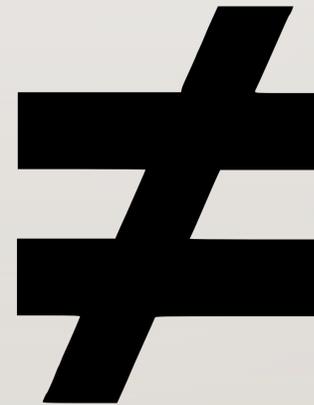
Putting it all together:

**Theology Proper = God +
Metaphysics + Rational Deduction
(top-down)**

- Theology Proper is one of the most abstract endeavors for the human mind to comprehend
- Theology Proper focuses more on rational thought, rather than imagination



Importance of God-Talk



God-Talk



- Univocal: Same concept
- Equivocal: Different Concept
- Analogical: Partly the same, but partly different

God-Talk: Examples

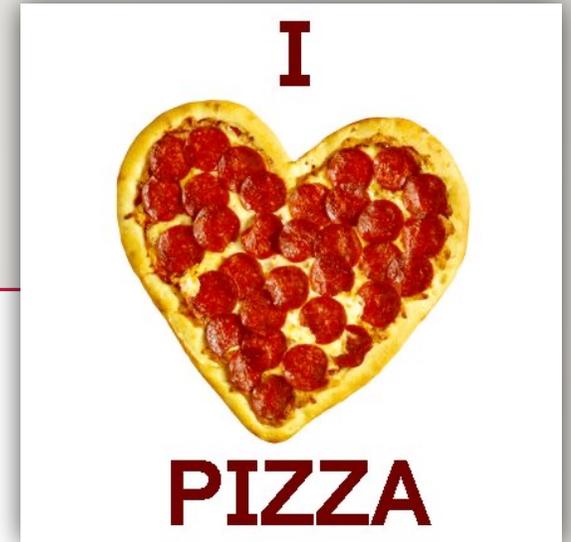
- Univocal vs. Equivocal
 - **Univocal** = “Good job on your paper” & “Good work finishing the dishes”
 - **Equivocal** = “That ice cream was good” & “Good grief, Charlie Brown!”



God-Talk: Examples

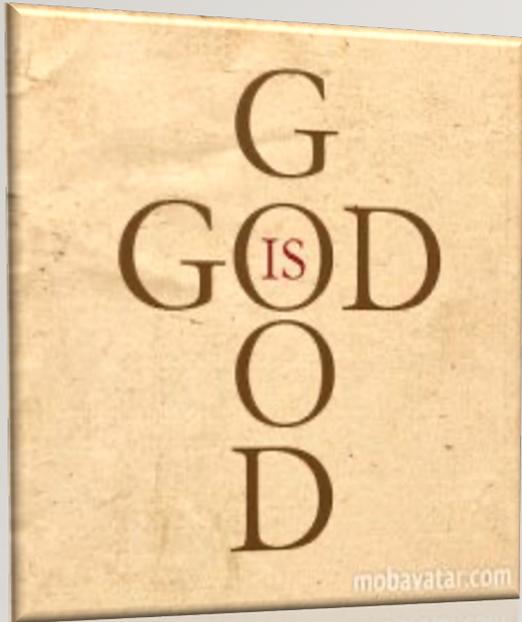
- ***Analogical Language***

- Words and things can be 'alike' and 'partly different'
- Example: "I love pizza" & "I love my mom and dad"
- In both statements, the word "Love" is describing one's 'loves' in similar yet different ways



I ❤️ My
Parents

God-Talk: Examples

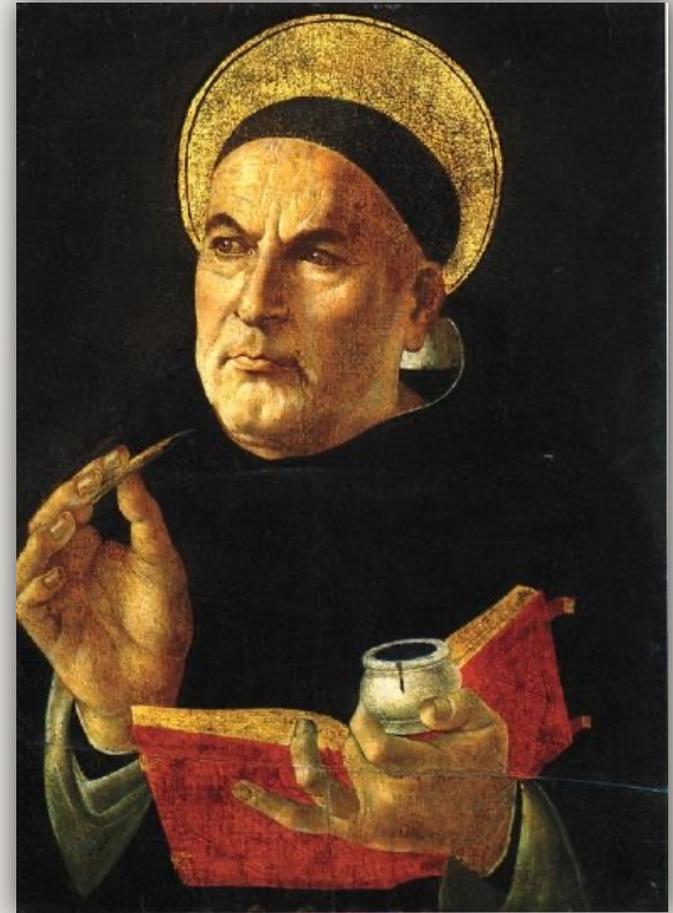


- *God is “Good”*
 - “Man is good and God is good, but God is good as God and man is good as man.”
 - “Qualified Agnosticism” = saying something true of God, but it is yet different than human-like.
- *God is “Wise”*
 - God and Solomon are wise, but literal *and* different.

GOD-TALK: ANALOGY

“So the language we use to speak of God is at one level inadequate and we do not know what God is. But in speaking of God we can, says Aquinas, speak truly. And we can know that we are doing so. In other words, his view is that what we say of God can be literally true, though the full reality signified by our words defies our comprehension. We can speak of God and mean what we say, but we cannot comprehend the reality which makes our statements true. Words such as ‘good’ and ‘wise’ truly characterize God, but they fail to represent adequately what he is.”

~ *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pg. 62

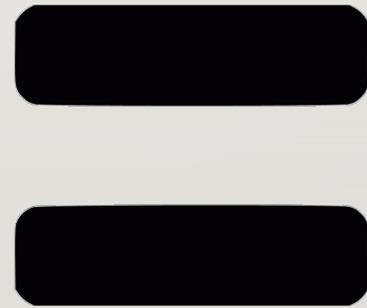


Anthropomorphisms, Metaphors, and Metaphysics

In order to make a Classical view of God consistent with the way, for example, Jewish Scripture talks about God, it is important to point out that Holy Scriptures uses:

- Metaphysical Language: “I AM that I AM” (Ex. 3:14);
- Metaphorical Language: “You shelter beneath my wings.” (Ps. 91:4);
- Anthropomorphic Language: “God walked with Adam in the cool of the day.” (Gen. 3:8) OR “The eyes of the Lord roam to and fro throughout the earth.” (2 Chron. 16:9).

Our First Attribute of God



Pure
Act

Our First
Attribute of God

Pure Act

Goodness & Will

Simple

Omnipresent

Immutable

Omnipotent

Eternal

Omniscient

Impassible

Immaterial

Infinite



God As Pure Act (Esse)

God

Pure Act = God is without potency,
He cannot change:

- 1) God is independent of all things;
- 2) God causes all things to exist;
- 3) God is pure existence (life).

“I the LORD do not change”

– Malachi 3:6

God As Pure Act: Biblical Foundation

#1 ~ God Exists Independently of All Else:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” – Genesis 1:1

God As Pure Act: Biblical Foundation

#2 ~ God Gives Existence to Everything Else:

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” – John 1:3

God As Pure Act: Biblical Foundation

#3 ~ God as Pure Existence (Pure “I AM”):

**“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’” – Exodus
3:14**

Understanding Terms: Potentiality, Actuality, & Esse

ESSE - TO BE
sum - I am
es - you are (i.e. sg.)
est - he/she/it is
sumus - we are
estis - you are (i.e. pl.)
sunt - they are

Potentiality = something can *change* or differ; something that “can be” other than it currently is.

Actuality = something that is *in act* or that which is (existence).

Esse = God’s pure act is esse (i.e. act of being, itself); God is something that cannot differ from what He already is, He is pure existence.

Analogy: Humans as Act & Potency

Humans = are given existence through participation in esse; they “come to be”:

- Humans have act (existence) from God, but not Pure Act;
- Humans have potency to change;
- Humans are like a rubber glove analogy.

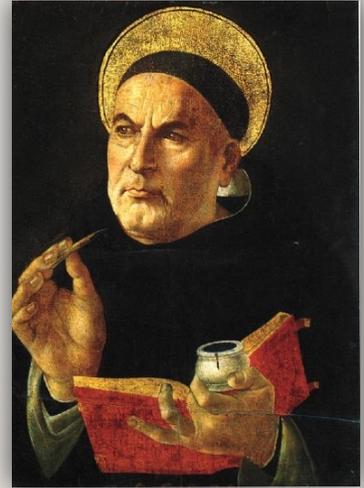
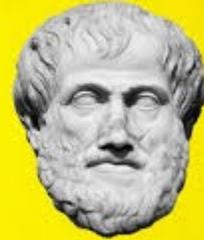


The Meaning of God as Pure Act

God is the:

- Unmoved Mover
- Uncaused Cause

ARISTOTLE



**THE
COSMOLOGICAL
ARGUMENT**



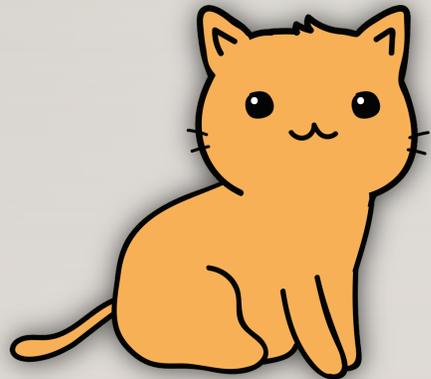
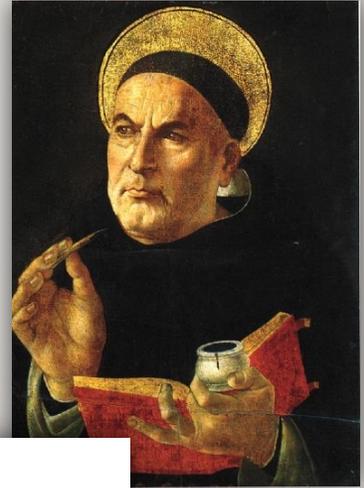
God is the
self-moved
cause of all



LIFE

The Meaning of God as Pure Act

Have you ever thought about the 'where'
existence comes from?



AN OBJECTION TO GOD AS PURE ACT

Objection: ‘How can God act in a changing world if He is unchanging?’

Answer: First, this confuses what God *is* and what He *does*. Second, God, who acts beyond time, is the cause of all effects in time; thus, God from eternity willed (decreed) His causes in a changing world (effects).

The Attributes of God



THE STUDY OF GOD'S
CLASSICAL ATTRIBUTES

Our Second
Attribute of God

Pure Act

Goodness & Will

Simple

Omnipresent

Immutable

Omnipotent

God

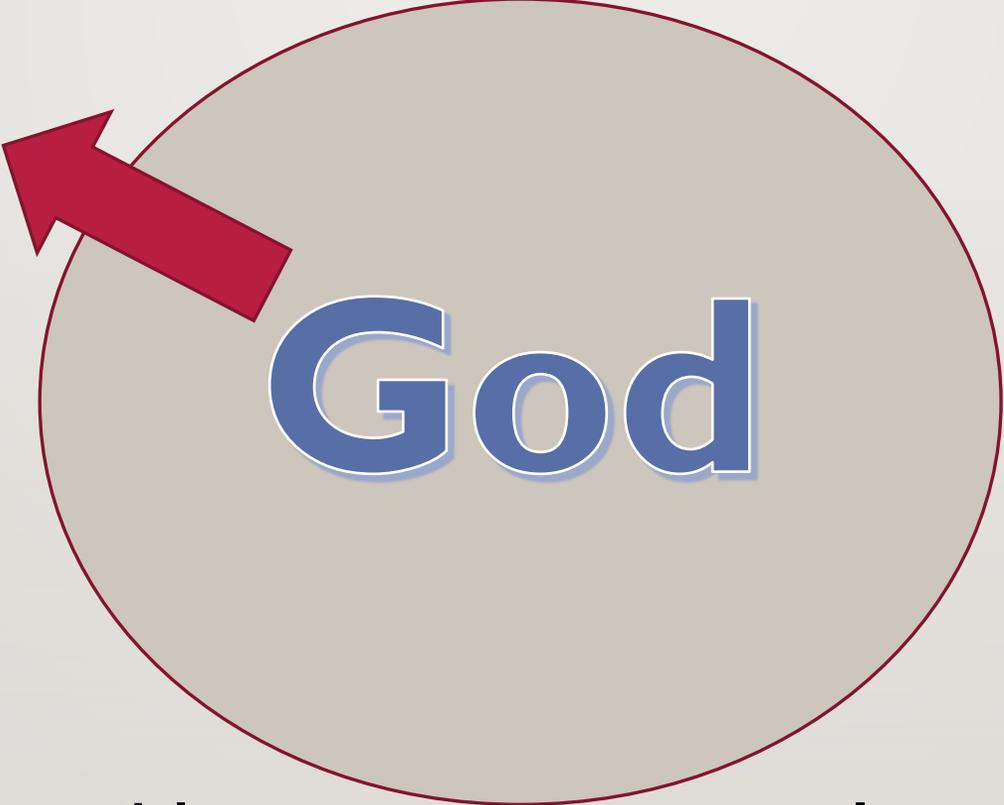
Eternal

Omniscient

Impassible

Immaterial

Infinite



God is Simple?

What it does not mean:

- God is dumb;
- God is not smart;
- God is unable to get out of a paper bag.



Urban Dictionary

So... What Does it Mean to Say God is Simple?

#1 ~ God does not have a body.

- God is a Spirit (immaterial), not a body.
- Bodies change, and bodies do not cause their own change.
- If God had a body, then that God would be made of parts.

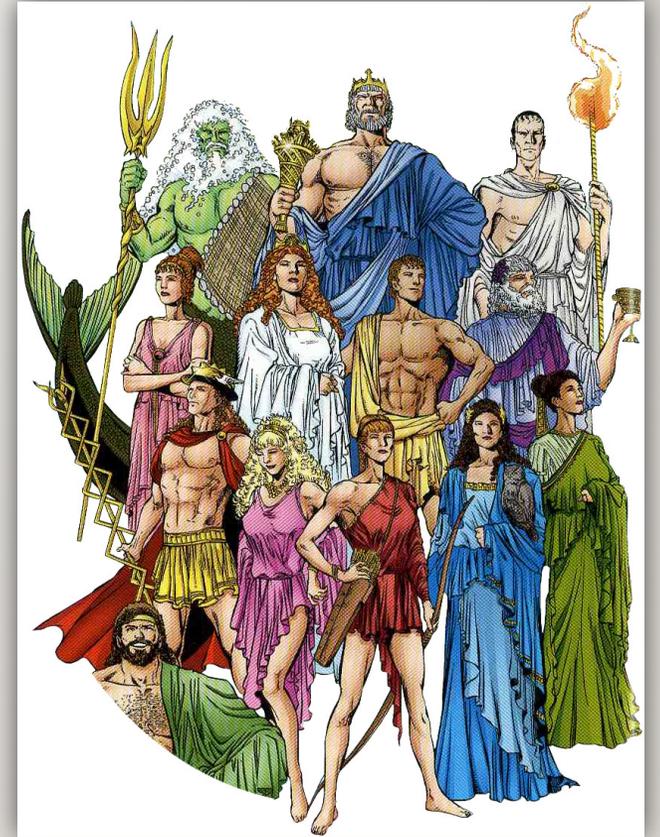


Mormonism

So... What Does it Mean to Say God is Simple?

#2 ~ God is not an individual of a kind.

- God is His own nature;
- Nothing shares His Divine Nature;
- There are not more 'gods' out there like Him.

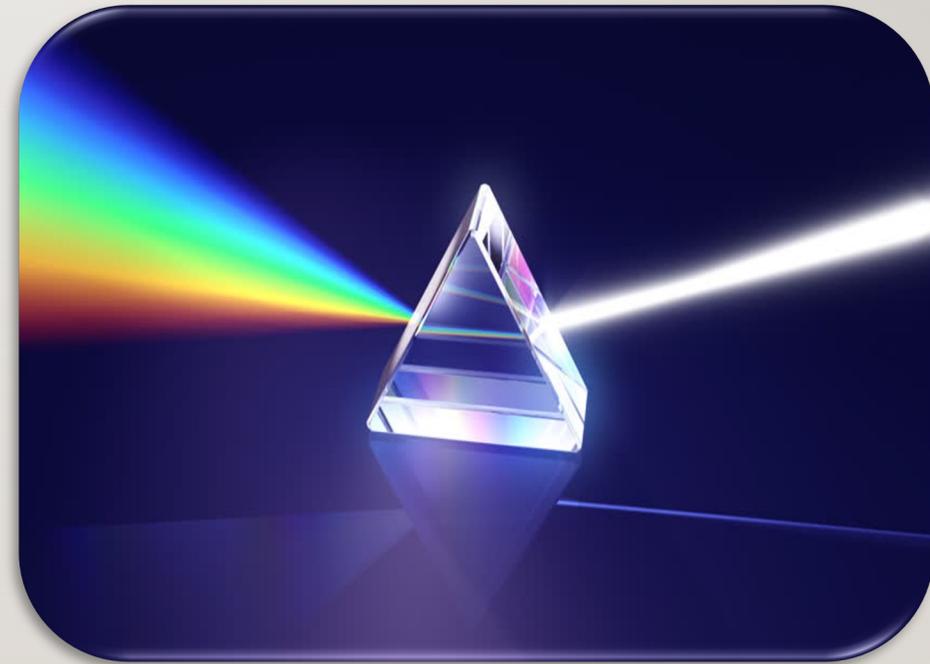


Greek Pantheon of Gods

So... What Does it Mean to Say God is Simple?

#3 ~ God has no accidents.

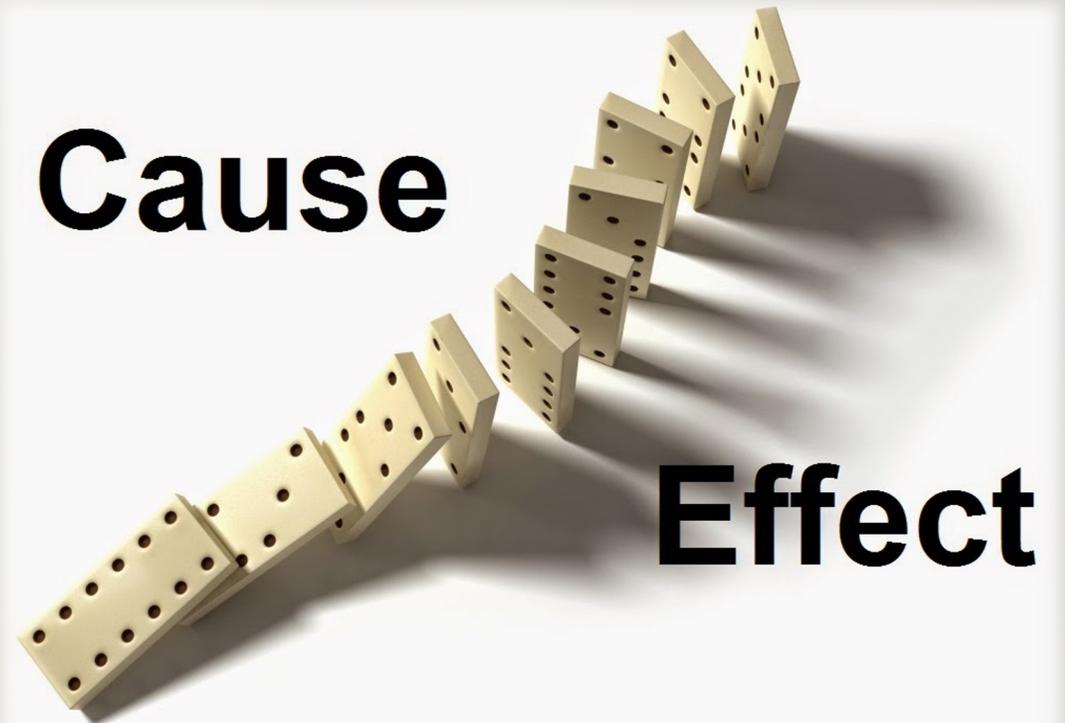
- Reminder: *Accident* = is a non-essential characteristic.
- Whatever God has, He is. For example:
 - If God has wisdom, then He *is* Wisdom;
 - If God has power, then He *is* Power.
- Everything God *is*, is essential to Him.



So... What Does it Mean to Say God is Simple?

#4 ~ God is His own Existences.

- Since God is Pure Act, then His very existences is His own possession;
- No one gave or caused God His existences, since He is Pure Act.



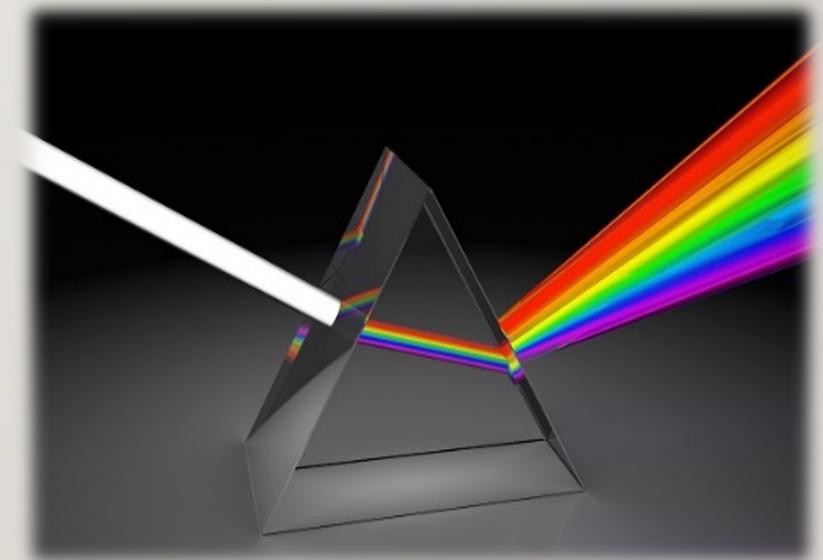
Objection to God as Simple

Objection

“How can God be Simple if God sounds like He has numerous properties (attributes) that He is like? For example, how can God have a property of Wisdom and a property of Power and still be viewed as simple?”

Response to Objection:

- God is Simple since the property of Wisdom and the property of Power both come from the same original source (i.e. God).
- The Properties (attributes) of God all reflect back to God like the multiple colors of a prism comes from a single stream of white light.
- Without logical contradiction, one can say God is Wisdom and that God is Power, since both properties originate from God and are not separate from Him.



Our Third
Attribute of God

Pure Act

Goodness & Will

Simple

Omnipresent

Immutable



God

Omnipotent

Eternal

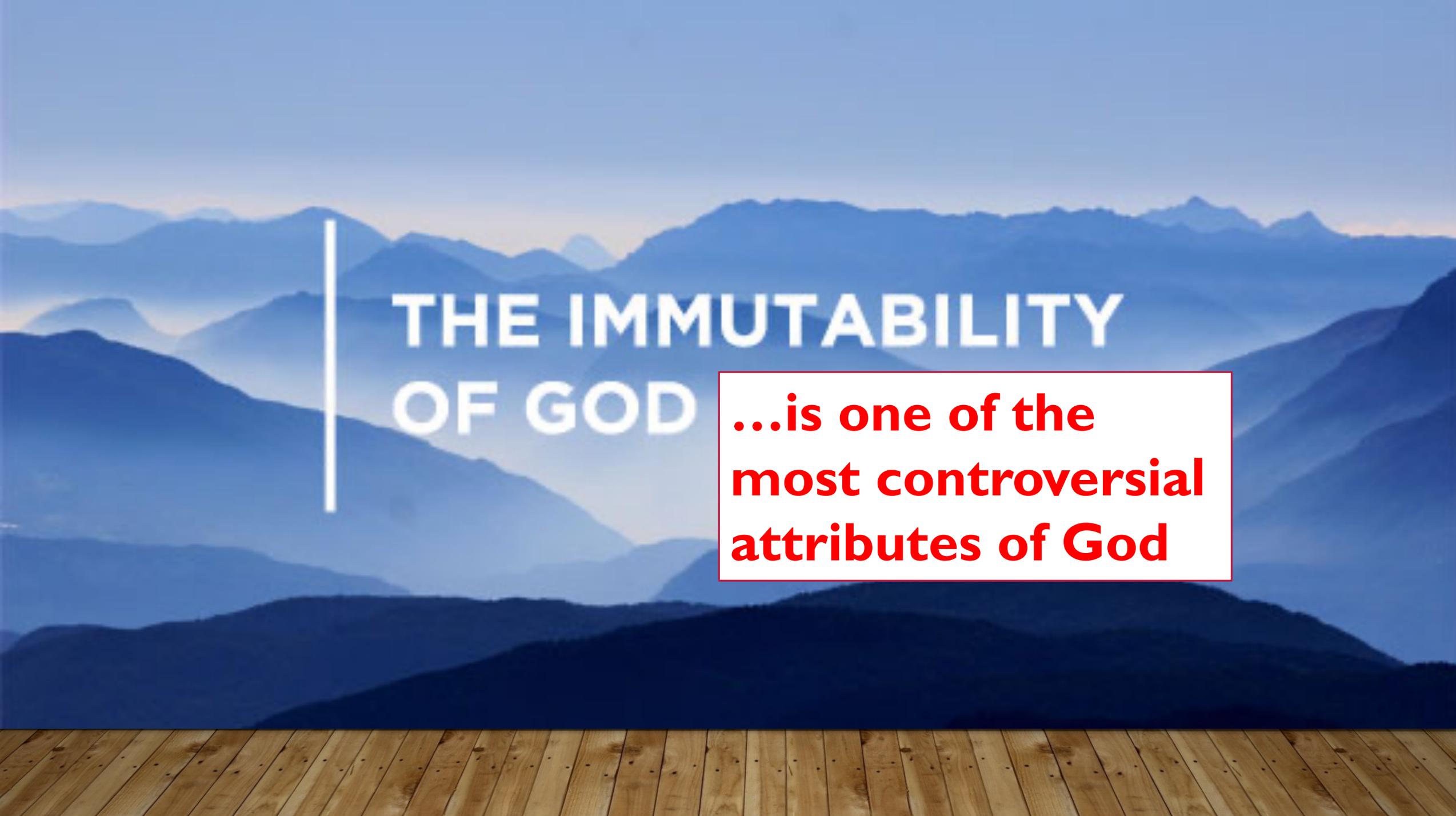
Omniscient

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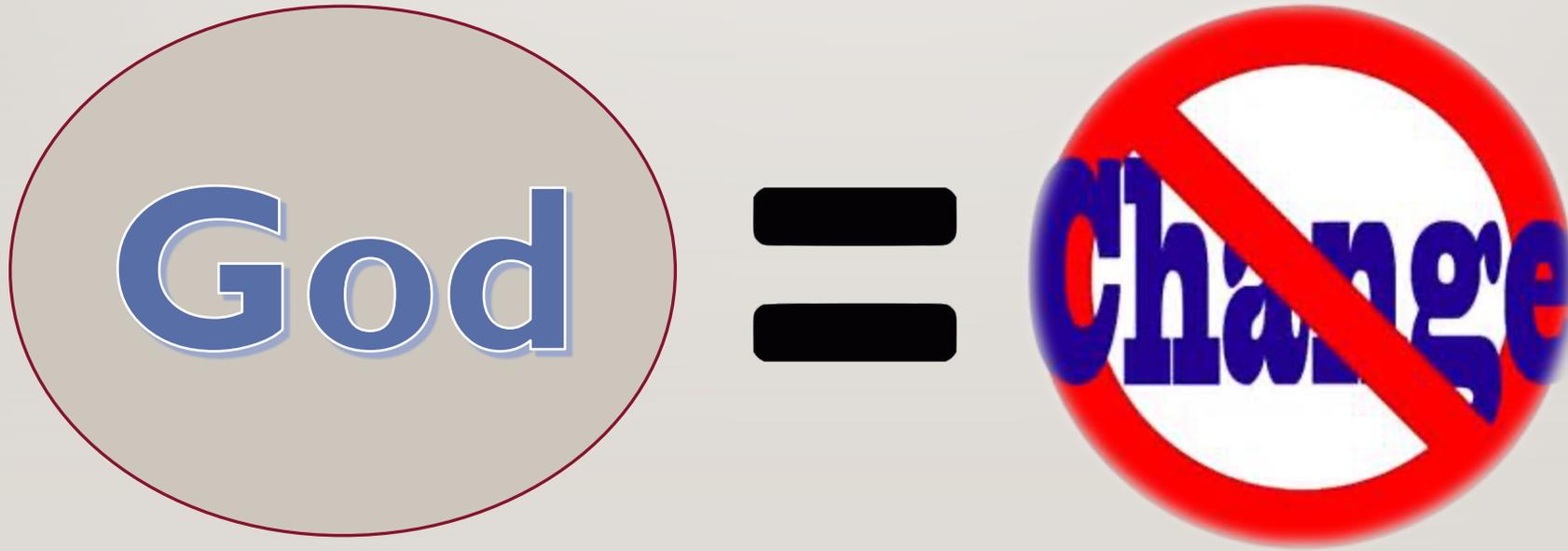


THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

**...is one of the
most controversial
attributes of God**

God As Immutable: Definition

God is unchangeable in His nature.



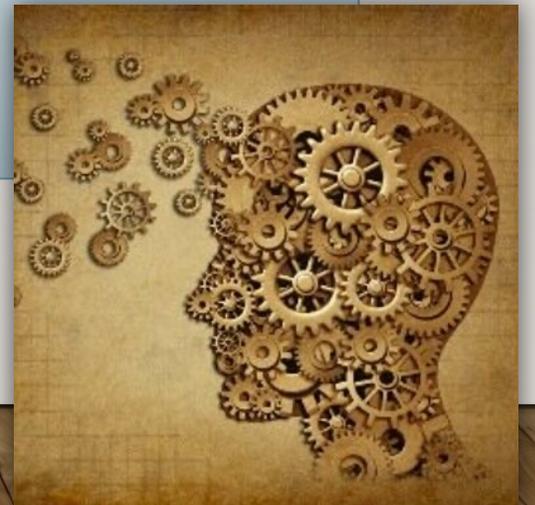
God As Immutable: Clarifying

- Immutability is *not* the mere fact that something doesn't or hasn't changed;
- It is the doctrine that for God, change is impossible (This is called a negation doctrine);
- *It denies all possibility of change in God.*

God As Immutable: Philosophical

Immutability comes from Pure Act:

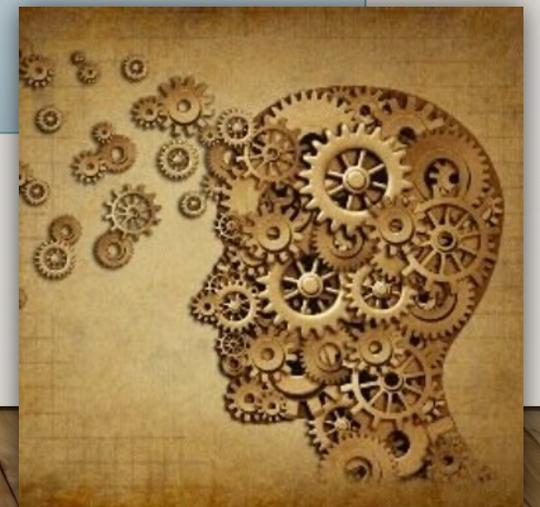
- a. Everything that changes has potentiality;
- b. God has no potentiality because God is pure actuality;
- c. So, God is immutable (no change).



God As Immutable: Philosophical

Immutability comes from Simplicity:

- a. Everything that changes is composed of parts;
- b. There is no composition in God because he is absolutely **simple**;
- c. So, God cannot change.



Objections to God as Immutable

Objection #1

“If God never changes, why bother praying to Him.”

Response to #1

- God knows all things (omniscient); therefore, God cannot change His mind (immutable).
- God cannot change His mind to how He answers our prayers.
- God knew whether or not humans would pray, so He can ordain human prayers to be the ‘means’ of accomplishing His purpose on earth.
- Prayer is not meant to change or effect God, but to change and alter the human.



Objections to God as Immutable

Objection #2

“If God never changes, then He cannot freely will anything (e.g. God had to create the universe if He is necessarily immutable)?”

Response to #2

- God wills (or loves) Himself, the infinite Goodness:
 - God is *inclined (not required)* to create, because His own goodness itself desires to communicate/share that goodness with others;
 - But if God creates creatures, it cannot be due to any unfulfilled need in God (God has no need of anything);
 - Thus, God created freely and voluntarily, not out of need or necessity;
 - Augustine of Hippo stated once, “Why does God create? Because He is not selfish.”
- God’s will is immutable and free, since whatever God wills is willed from His own internal Goodness/Desire.

Our Fourth
Attribute of God

Pure Act

Goodness & Will

Simple

Omnipresent

Immutable

Omnipotent

Eternal



God

Omniscient

Impassible

Immaterial

Infinite



What is Time?

What Time *is*:

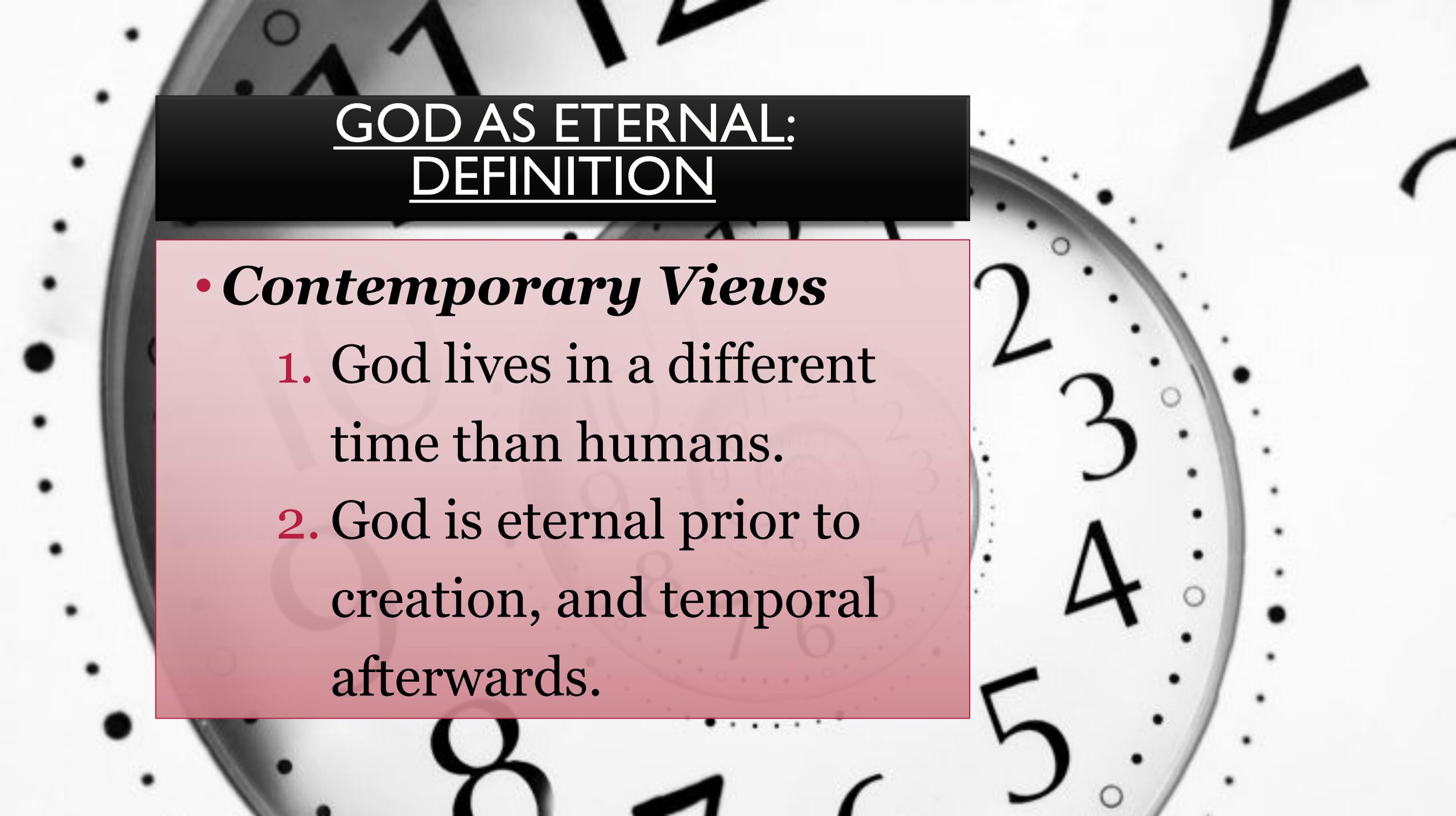
- **“Time is something a mind does when it encounters moving things”.**
 - For the Classical Theist, eternity is understood through its contrast with time (negation).

What is Time?

What Time *is*:

- Time: ***The number of movement in respect of 'before' and 'after'***:
 - Our minds measure time in parts (e.g. slow motion video of man diving into the water):
 - Person in a coma = loses tract of time;
 - Movies stop time by stopping motion.

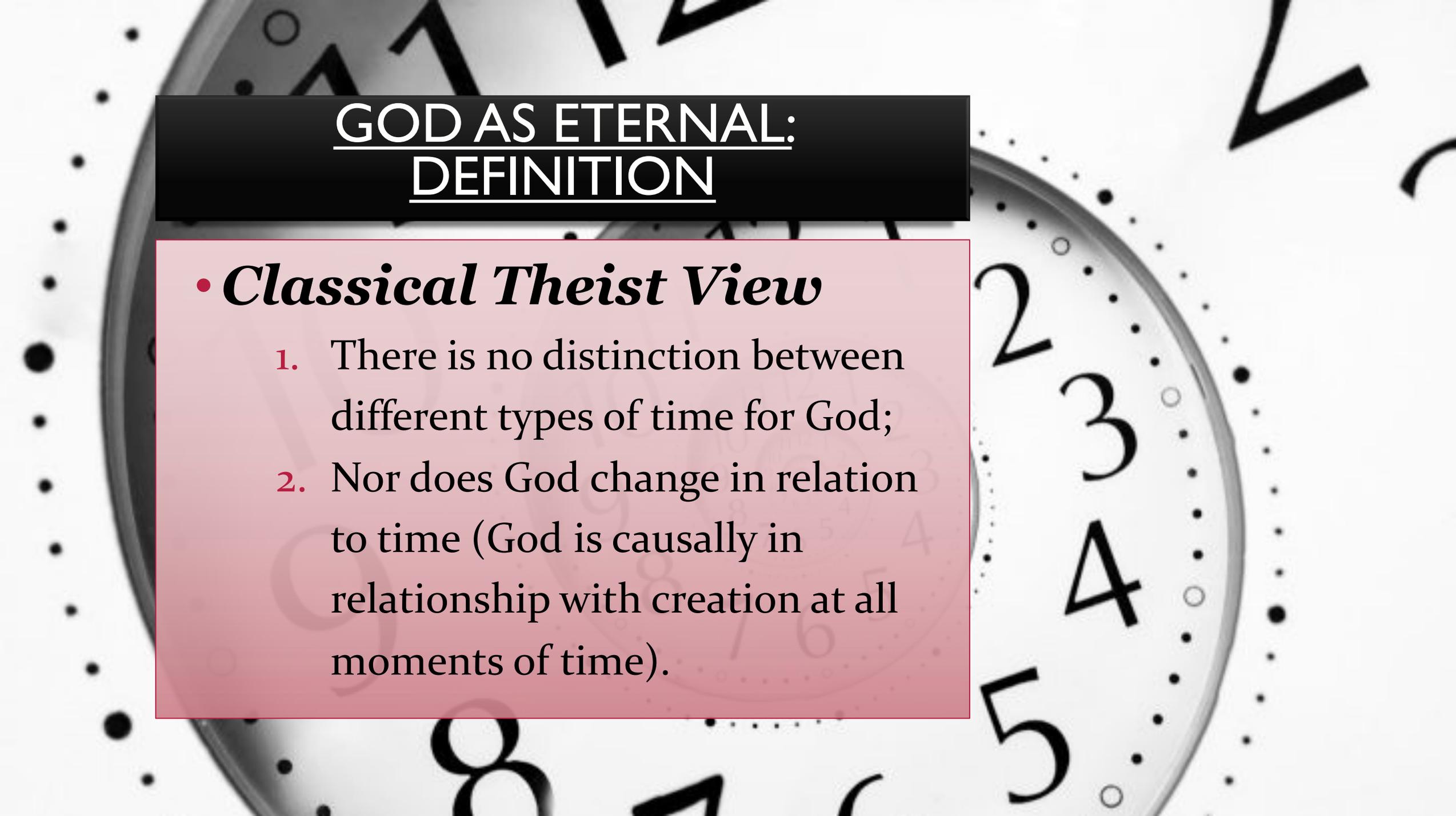




GOD AS ETERNAL: DEFINITION

- ***Contemporary Views***

1. God lives in a different time than humans.
2. God is eternal prior to creation, and temporal afterwards.



GOD AS ETERNAL: DEFINITION

- ***Classical Theist View***

1. There is no distinction between different types of time for God;
2. Nor does God change in relation to time (God is causally in relationship with creation at all moments of time).

GOD AS ETERNAL: DEFINITION

• ***Classical Theist View***

1. God's Eternity = *is the complete possession all at once of endless life (Pure Act):*
 - Eternity is the duration that is the proper measure for an Immutable Being;
 - God's type of life is called "eternal".
2. God is above and beyond time (transcendent).
3. God simply has an enduring eternal present.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD

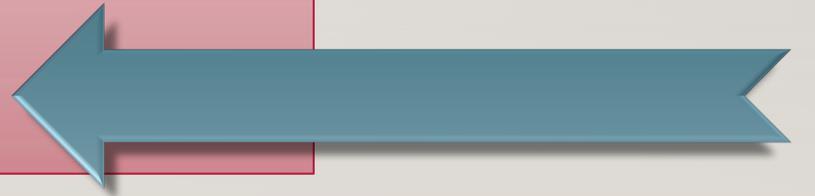
KEY ~ Eternity is the ***denial***
of two features of time:

- Succession according to 'before' and 'after';
- Borders of 'beginning' and 'end'.



THE ETERNITY OF GOD

I) Eternity is an immutable, everlasting *now*. Thus, eternity involves infinity (no limits), and so is identified with the pure actuality of God. One can know what eternity means, but we cannot picture it *in our imagination.*

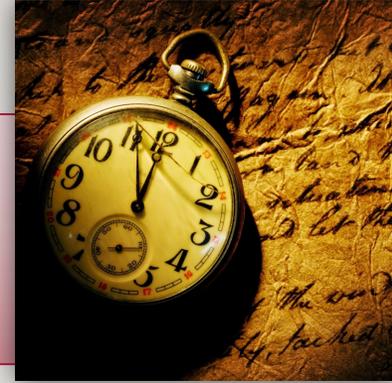


THE ETERNITY OF GOD

2) Every attempt to envision eternity in our imagination **results merely in a lengthened view of imaginary time.** And time, as we have just noticed, is essentially different from eternity, and is even opposite to it.



Objection to God as Eternal



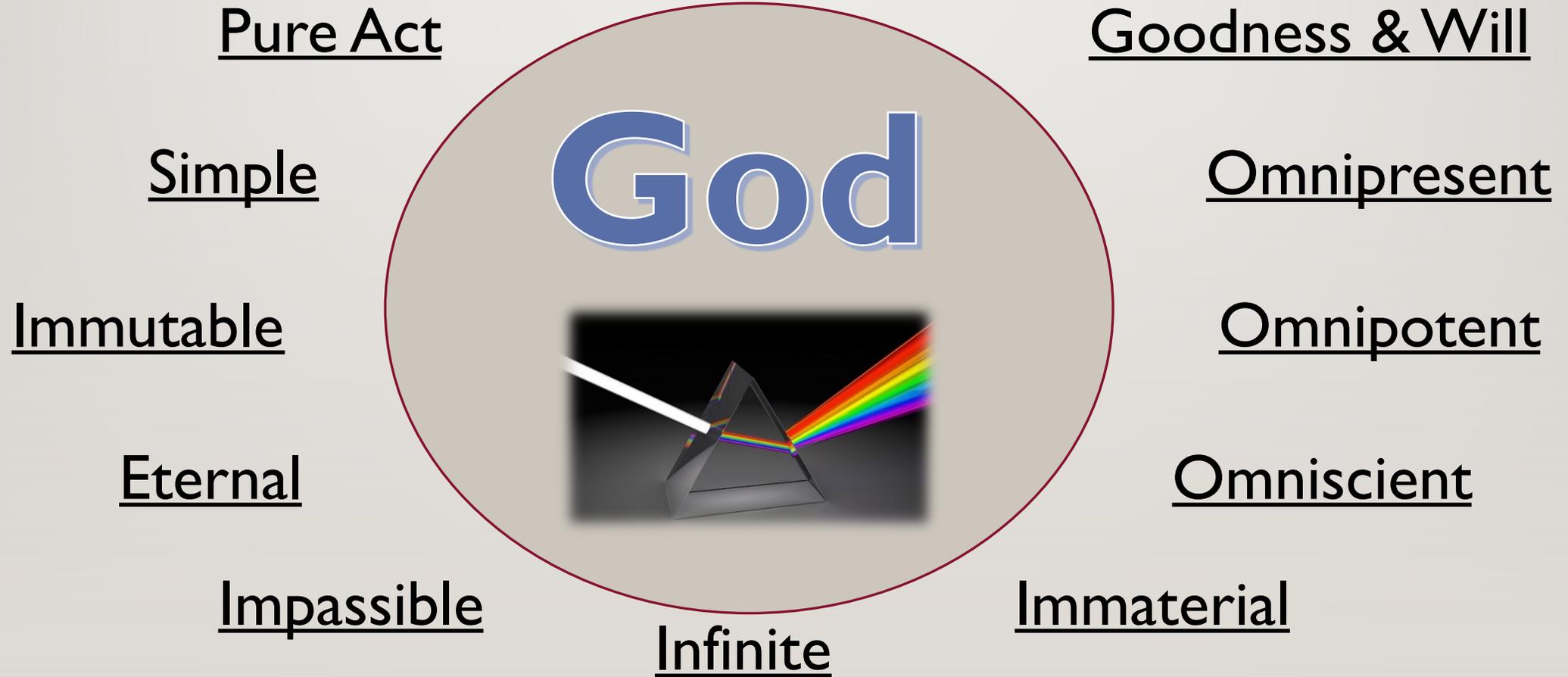
Objection

“If God is eternal, then He cannot relate to temporal things? Therefore, God must be temporal in order to relate to humans, who live in time.”

Response to Objection

- God knows all things in the temporal world, since He is their very ‘cause’ of existence. (God is Pure Act)
- God knows all things from eternity (omniscience), since it is the only way for an object to exist outside of God’s being.
- God does not know propositions, but real causes:
 - **“Order of its cause”** = God sees all of the relations and causes of any given moment;
 - Since time is not a “thing,” it is not something that God sees. Instead, He does see everything that makes up the substance of the indivisible present moments and those moment’s causal relationship with all other moments in time;
 - In this way, **God knows through the order of causes “what time it is now,” without this implying any temporality in the divine essence of God.**

What are your thoughts of the Theistic-God, so far?



Let me know in our next Zoom Meeting
if you have any questions.

