

## There Is Only One God (2)

*Text: Belgic Confession 1; Deuteronomy 6:1-9*

*Belgic Confession* article 1 begins: “We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God.” This opening statement declares *divine simplicity*, which is the central truth of the article. Simplicity refers to God’s *unity*—He is not made up of parts, is not composed, and cannot be divided. The terms “one,” “only,” and “simple” form a triad emphasizing God’s absolute oneness.

This doctrine excludes all forms of polytheism, dualism, pantheism, and atheism. Ancient religions like Greco-Roman mythology had many gods. Hinduism, a modern polytheistic system, follows the same pattern. Dualists such as the Manichaeans posited two eternal forces of good and evil. The confession asserts without qualification that there is one God. Simplicity also rejects agnosticism and relativism by affirming that God is knowable as He reveals Himself. Atheism, by contrast, denies God’s existence entirely. But the Christian confession begins with certainty: there *is* one only God.

Four points unfold the meaning of simplicity. First, there is only one God. Second, God’s being is His attributes. Unlike humans who merely possess qualities, God *is* His perfections. A man may be kind, but he is not identical with kindness. God, however, is identical with His love, justice, holiness, and eternity (“God *is* love... *is* truth... *is* grace”). Third, all attributes in God are *one*. God’s love is His justice; His mercy is His power; His wisdom is His holiness. Though we rightly distinguish these conceptually, there is no division in God. As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* puts it (Q. & A. 4): “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” All these attributes are equally infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Fourth, no attribute is higher than another. Yet much of modern theology elevates love above all else. Methodism, liberalism, and evangelicalism have made this error. Liberalism insisted that if God is love, He cannot punish eternally. New England theology drifted from Calvinism to Arminianism to universalism. Overstressing love undermines justice and leads to errors such as denying hell.

Simplicity thus demands a God who is indivisibly righteous, merciful, wise, and good. He is not a composite of competing traits but *one pure Being*. He

cannot possess temporal affections or conflicting desires. Simplicity means God's perfections are always present, unified, and absolute.

### **Simplicity and the Unity of God**

Divine simplicity corrects the notion of a divided God or temporary divine affections. Theories like "common grace" and "the free offer of the gospel" suggest that God shows love to the reprobate for a time before casting them into hell. But God's love is not partial or temporal. It is eternal, infinite, unchangeable, wise, holy, just, and good. If what is called "love" lacks these qualities, it is not the love of God.

To posit "two kinds" of divine love—an infinite love for the elect and a lesser love for the reprobate—is to divide God's nature. Some even claim God has two "levels" of love. But divine simplicity excludes that. God does not possess dual wills or mixed affections. He is unified in purpose, being, and action. The God who decrees is the God who acts and saves, without variation or contradiction. Modern tendencies to magnify love above all else weaken biblical theology. Liberalism's denial of hell arose from making love God's primary or sole attribute. Evangelicals who proclaim a "universal" divine love often fall into the same error, neglecting divine holiness and justice. This results in doctrinal compromise and moral laxity.

Such a distortion also produces antinomianism. If God loves everyone unconditionally, why obey? But divine simplicity means God's love cannot be separated from His holiness. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 teaches: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." Jesus repeats this, adding "with all thy mind." The "Shema" (Deut. 6:4) declares divine unity, and calls for undivided love in response.

This unity in God demands unity in worship and obedience. We are not permitted to respond to God with partial loyalty, split affections, or selective theology. Because God is one, we are called to love Him with our *whole* being. Divine simplicity also upholds God's immutability. If His attributes are not parts but His very being, then He cannot grow in love, diminish in justice, or alter His truth. Every divine action is an expression of His total, unchanging perfection. This preserves true worship, doctrinal clarity, and assurance of faith.

## Simplicity and Its Doctrinal Implications

Simplicity is essential to the doctrine of the Trinity. *Belgic Confession* article 8 begins, “According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is *one single essence*,” and adds, “*in which* are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct.” It then clarifies, “God is *not* by this distinction *divided* into three.” Simplicity protects us from *tritheism*—believing in three gods—and ensures that we confess one divine essence in three persons.

Article 9 confirms that Scripture teaches “three persons in *one only divine essence*.” Article 11, on the divinity of the Holy Spirit, declares the Spirit to be “*of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son*.” Without simplicity, we would not have the conceptual grounding to affirm the *unity* of the Trinity.

Simplicity also safeguards soteriology. Article 20 is entitled, “God Hath Manifested His Justice and Mercy in Christ.” It says that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son for our salvation. God’s justice was shown in placing our sin upon Christ. His mercy was revealed in giving Christ for us. Article 16 (“Eternal Election”) likewise teaches that God is merciful in saving the elect and just in leaving the reprobate. These are not competing forces in God but united actions of one perfectly simple being.

Psalm 85:10 declares, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” This poetic language describes what divine simplicity teaches theologically: in God, justice and mercy are not at odds. They are fully expressed in Christ. God is not partly just and partly merciful—He is *altogether both at once*.

The confession also teaches that God is “spiritual.” This means He is not material, has no body or parts, and is not subject to passions. A material being is composed, limited, and changeable. But God, who is omnipresent, cannot be confined, measured, or divided. His spirituality is vital to His simplicity. As the *Heidelberg Catechism* (Lord’s Day 35) says, “God neither can nor may be represented by any means.” Simplicity and spirituality together demand that God be worshiped not by images but in spirit and truth.

These truths are foundational to the first two commandments. The first commandment rests on God’s *simplicity*: we are to have no other gods. The second rests on His *spirituality*: we are not to make images. The *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches in Q. & A. 94 that we are to trust, love, fear, and submit to God alone. Q. & A. 95 defines idolatry as trusting in anything alongside or in place of the only true God.

## God's Attributes and the Confession's Authority

*Belgic Confession* article 1 lists ten divine attributes: "eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good." These were drawn from earlier sources such as the *French Confession* and Beza's confession. The Synod of Dordt (1618-19) added "almighty" and standardized the list. Arminians later criticized the article, claiming it omitted key attributes such as omnipotence, mercy, anger, and hatred. But hatred is not an attribute of God—it is an expression of His justice. Romans 9:13 says, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," yet this hatred is not a trait in God's essence. It is His righteous judgment. Similarly, anger and severity are manifestations of divine justice, not separate divine perfections.

The confession does not claim to be exhaustive. Just as no sermon or prayer lists every divine attribute, neither must article 1. The Arminians' aim was not completeness but to discredit article 16 on election by undermining the whole confession. The Synod of Dordt upheld the *Belgic Confession*, revised it slightly for clarity, and adopted it as an official standard. Article 1 remains a settled and authoritative statement on God's being.

The attributes listed are often divided into *incommunicable* and *communicable*. The incommunicable ones—eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, and almighty—belong to God alone. The communicable ones—wise, just, and good—can be reflected in God's people. Through the Spirit, believers are made wise, just, and good in a creaturely way.

Briefly defined: "Eternal" means God exists beyond time. "Incomprehensible" means He can be truly known but not fully grasped. "Invisible" affirms that we cannot see God, even in heaven. "Immutable" means He never changes. "Infinite" means unlimited in all respects. "Almighty" means He can do all His holy will. "Wise" means all things are ordered for His glory. "Just" means He perfectly upholds righteousness. "Good" means He is the source of all good. And "the overflowing fountain of all good" teaches that every blessing flows from Him.

Helpful resources include A. W. Pink's *The Attributes of God*, Ronald Hanko's *Doctrine According to Godliness* and Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics*. Hoeksema's treatment is especially valuable, as he defines God's attributes not primarily in relation to creatures, but as perfections within the triune life of God Himself. When we say "God is love," we mean that the Father loves the Son in the Spirit. All attributes are first internal to God, and only then revealed in His works.