

## God: I AM

Exodus 3:1-14

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

Many of you know that the children's catechism popular in our circles begins with: who made you? To which the answer is God. The second question is: what else did God make? And the answer is: God made all things. And you all know the inevitable question a bright child will ask (at some point) as you teach them the truth that God is the cause of all things that are made. Well, then, who made God? Even atheists ask this question. If everything needs a cause, and we trace things back to God, then, what's his cause? Why can't we have an infinite series of causes?

Now there are good philosophical ways to respond to this question (and bad ones), but we are not going to do that here. What we should be clear about, however, is that the Christian claim is NOT that everything has a cause. If everything had a cause then (presumably) God WOULD need a cause. The Christian claim is that every EFFECT has a cause. And God is not an effect. So what's the answer to who caused God? *Well, that is what we want to look at this morning. And we will do so under three headings: Being, Blessedness and Bounty.*

### I. Being

First, then, being. R.C. Sproul said that chills go up and down his spine whenever he sees the word Aseity. In short, the being of God excites him. Aseity is not a word we use a lot, but it points to a foundational, and profound truth about God. Aseity comes from the Latin *a-se*. *A* meaning "from" and *Se* meaning "self." So, it means God is from himself. He has existence, or being, from himself, or within himself. Now, this does not mean that God is his own cause – or that God causes himself.

That is an incoherent proposition. Nothing, even God, can be its own cause. Because it would already have to BE, to then cause itself. The universe is not its own cause, even God is not his own cause. When we say God is *a-se*, or when we predicate aseity of him, when we say God lives from himself: We just mean that God is utterly independent, that he depends on no one or no-thing, he is fully self-sufficient, He just lives. He is life. He is the living God. He doesn't cause

himself to be. There is no becoming in God. He just is. He is being itself. He is the uncreated source of all being. The unmade maker. The uncaused cause. He designates himself, in the words of our OT text, from Exodus 3 as: I am who I am. And he is the only being who can make such an utterance. He is who he is. He is self-existence. He cannot, not exist. We are frail, fleeting, contingent, dying beings. We live, as has been said, between two hospitals. This One, our God, is immortal fulness of uncaused life: I am who I am.

Now, your spine is tingling right?

At this point, lest you might think this is a novelty or a fringe idea, I want to cite the great (19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>) Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck. Here is his incredibly rich description of Aseity (representative of the whole tradition across the centuries):

God is exclusively from himself, not in the sense of being self-caused, but being from eternity to eternity who he is, being not becoming.

God is absolute being, the fulness of being, and therefore also eternally and absolutely independent in his existence, in his perfections, in all his works, the first and the last, the sole cause and final goal of all things.

In this aseity of God, conceived not only as having being from himself, but also as the fulness of being, all other perfections are included.

Now you can see – this IS spine tingling stuff for those who love God in and of himself. Now if this is boring – one will have to conclude that God is boring. If this isn't practical enough, then one will have to conclude that the being of God is impractical. But we know better. We know high theology is highly practical – and in closing we will see how.

Now, listen to the WCF speak of our God. They don't use the word aseity, but this is an unpacking of the reality of him who is and lives, a-se, from himself. Here's our Confession: God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient. Language falters at trying to describe the perfection, the unmeasured perfection of our God: All life, glory, goodness and blessedness he has in and of himself. He is absolutely self-sufficient. He does not derive anything from any source. Job 41 and Isaiah 40, for example, both declare that no one has first given to God that they should be repaid to him.

Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him justice? Who showed him the way of knowledge and understanding? The confession goes on to say, then, that he is "the alone fountain of all being." And this fountain of all being is, as Psalm 36 puts it, a fountain of life. God just is life. This is behind all the ascriptions of God in Scripture as the Living God.

He is the ever-living One, the immortal God. It is not possible for him to die. He swears by himself as the One who lives forever. He is, the King of the ages, *immortal*, invisible, the only God. As we saw last week he dwells in unapproachable light, but the full verse (from 1 Timothy 6) speaks of God as he who alone has *immortality*, who dwells in unapproachable light. As sinners, Romans 1 says, we exchange the glory of the *immortal* God for images resembling mortal man. God has life, not like we have it. He has life because he IS life.

We can see this doctrine even in the ministry of the Incarnate God, the Son, the second person of the Trinity. In John 5, Christ speaks of the aseity of God which he himself shares in: For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And of the Son, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, John says: in him was life, and the life was the light of men. It is this life, the life that God is, that we are given to share in. Knowing this One is participation in his eternal life. That's being.

## **II. Blessedness**

Our second point is blessedness. Some of you took a SS class I taught a few years ago where we used Michael Reeve's book *Delighting in the Trinity* (Good place to start on the topic of God – I hope to get to God's Triunity soon). Reeve's had a (humorous) heading at one point which read: Single God, Non-smoker, Seeks attractive creation with a good sense of humor. His point was that God has need of nothing. He has no deficiencies, no lack which drives him to create. God is, in himself, apart from us, infinitely happy. This will become even clearer when we consider the Trinity and the eternal communion – interpenetrating communion – of the three persons in love and light and life – but we can make the point equally well from God's aseity.

Here's the Westminster Confession again: God has all life, glory, goodness, and – note – blessedness – in and of himself.

The creation and the redemption of a billion worlds, can not make God one iota happier than he is in his infinite, self-sufficient being. God is infinitely happy in himself. And it is not possible to add to his happiness, because he has – and has had from eternity – ALL blessedness in and of himself.

Now, this can be unnerving to us. We are egotistical creatures, and we like the idea of God's happiness depending on us, and our works. On our earnest Christian endeavors. But that is because we have low, all too human, conceptions of God. And we are always thinking him down to our level – always involved in cognitive idolatry. Surely we can do God some good, right?

Here's some bracing words from George Swinnock, 17<sup>th</sup> c English Puritan: neither the creatures' goodness, nor their goods, do him the least good. Well, that's disquieting, especially for a church that has been running around hysterically absorbed with everything but the being of God for the past 21 months.

One thing the pandemic did NOT do was drive us deep into God himself. One would, to listen, think the very blessedness of God depends on the American cultural and political situation. Rather, God's self-sufficiency, Swinnock insists, means "he gains nothing by all the services, prayers and praises of his people. Neither does he lose anything by their neglect of their duties." What? What if we don't do our duty and America decays or falls? Won't God's glory be diminished? Won't he lose something? No. And if you don't believe this you don't have the Biblical God.

Here's the same point from our Confession (same chapter 2): God does not stand in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them.

This is a crucial point of Paul's address in Athens at the Areopagus in Acts 17 – which was our NT lesson. This was a place where the philosophers convened, to talk about gods and the like. So to differentiate the Biblical God from all others, Paul says that:

*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*

As though he needed anything! Even something he established, like the sacrificial system of worship, is not because he needs the offerings. Listen to Psalm 50:

*I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. <sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. <sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. <sup>12</sup> "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.*

God does not need even our worship. We, and it, are superfluous, completely unnecessary, to his absolute fullness of joy. To summarize: J.H. Thornwell, the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Southern Presbyterian pastor (JLV PhD) puts it this way: The universe has added nothing to his bliss and can subtract nothing from his fullness. It is just this that we mean – or should mean when – we call God blessed.

### **III. Bounty**

Finally, bounty. God is the fullness of being, and as such, he is the fulness of blessedness, and finally, out of this fulness we experience his bounty. In ourselves, we are broken cisterns, which can hold no water. We live by derivative life. Life and being drawn from elsewhere. In him we live and move and have our being. We get life and breath and all things from him. From the inexhaustible fountain of life.

In the words of Psalm 104, speaking of creatures relation to the self-sufficient Creator:

*When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.*

All we have, then, come from the fountain of all being. The fountain of life overflows (in free love, for God has no needs) and we live. This is a fountain which diffuses its goodness through the creation, and on which the whole created order hangs. Calvin says: no drop will be found, either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him and of which he is not the cause.

This is the bounty which such a God shares with us. In fact, his disposition of bounty toward us – his desire to bless us that we might share his blessedness -- extends back into eternity, into the mystery and glory of his being. For, as Ephesians 1 says: he blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, and he did this by choosing in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

*In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has (NOW) blessed us in the Beloved.*

His blessing of us, flows out of his underived, uncaused, all-sufficient blessedness. He gave us grace, in Christ, Paul says in 2 Timothy 1, before the ages began. And in the fulness of time, Christ comes, the One who, as God, has life in himself, and yet as man, lives a life of deep dependence on his Father. The One who alone can say: I am the resurrection and the life. I am the I AM of Exodus 3 in human flesh. That One empties himself, even unto death, enters into our poverty, our utter dependence, our subjection to death, that now, exalted, he might fill us up. As John puts it of the Word made flesh: For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. From the fulness of life, possessed by the God-Man, we receive grace.

Do you want to see this doctrine and its connection to your salvation in an even more clear and condensed way? Here's Colossians 2, 9 and 10: *For in him the*

*whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

Because the fullness of deity, the fulness of being and blessedness, dwells in Christ bodily, you have been filled, made complete in him. This independent, needless God will supply all our needs, according to his glorious riches manifested in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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