

# FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

## THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

### UNIT 4: THE INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

#### Lesson 9

### The Aseity and Self-Sufficiency of God

The God Who Depends on Nothing and No One

**Key Texts:** Acts 17:24–25; Exodus 3:14; John 5:26; Psalm 50:10–12

I AM WHO I AM — The Self-Existent God Who Needs Nothing We Can Give

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#### Series Verse

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

**Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995**

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## Introduction

With Lesson 9 we cross a third great threshold in our study of Theology Proper. Units 1 through 3 carried us through the prolegomenal foundations (how we know God and how we speak of Him), the existence and unity of God (that He is and that He is one), and the names of God (who He is as He has disclosed Himself across the sweep of redemptive history, culminating in the Person of His Son). Now, in Unit 4, we press deeper into the very being of God Himself, not merely the names He bears in relation to His people, but the intrinsic, essential attributes that belong to Him in Himself, prior to and independent of all His relations to creation.

Unit 4 is devoted to what the theological tradition calls the incommunicable attributes of God, those perfections of the divine being that belong exclusively to God and cannot, even in a derivative or analogical form, be shared with or possessed by any creature. The communicable attributes, love, holiness, wisdom, justice, goodness, are attributes that God, in some measure, shares with His image-bearers: we can love, however imperfectly; we can be holy, in a derived and graced sense; we can be wise and just and good. But the incommunicable attributes, aseity, immutability, eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, belong to God alone. They describe what it means to be God as opposed to being a creature, and they constitute the irreducible ontological distinction between the Creator and everything He has made.

We begin with what many theologians regard as the most foundational of all the incommunicable attributes: the aseity and self-sufficiency of God. Aseity, from the Latin *a se*, “from Himself”, is the doctrine that God exists entirely from and of Himself, without origin, without cause, and without dependence upon anything outside His own being. It is the attribute that the divine name “I AM WHO I AM” most directly and most profoundly declares. And it is the attribute that, when truly grasped, revolutionizes not merely our theology but our worship, our prayers, our assurance, and the entire orientation of our souls before the God who made us.

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## I. Defining Aseity: The God Who Exists from Himself

The doctrine of aseity is, in its most compressed form, the affirmation that God is the one Being in all of reality who does not owe His existence to anything other than Himself. Every other being that exists, every angel, every galaxy, every human soul, every subatomic particle, exists because something else brought it into being or sustains it in being. Created things are ontologically dependent; their existence is derived, contingent, and sustained moment by moment by a power outside themselves. God alone is ontologically independent; His existence is not derived from anything, not contingent upon any conditions being met, and not sustained by any power outside His own infinite being. He exists from Himself (*a se*), through Himself (*per se*), and in Himself (*in se*).

The philosophical tradition has sometimes expressed this by distinguishing between necessary being and contingent being. A contingent being is one that might not have existed, one whose existence depends on certain conditions being in place, and which

could, in principle, have not existed or could cease to exist if those conditions were withdrawn. A necessary being is one whose non-existence is impossible, one who exists not because certain conditions happen to be in place, but because existence belongs to His very nature, such that to ask “Why does He exist?” is to ask a question with only one possible answer: because He is who He is. God is the only necessary Being; all else is contingent.

The classical theological tradition has also expressed aseity through the distinction between essence and existence in creatures and the identity of essence and existence in God. In every created being, what a thing is (its essence) can be distinguished from that it is (its existence): it is possible to have a complete description of what a unicorn is without that description entailing that any unicorn actually exists. But in God, essence and existence are identical: God’s existence is not something added to His essence or derived from outside it; His existence is His essence, and His essence is His existence. The name “I AM WHO I AM” is not merely a statement about God’s eternal duration; it is a philosophical declaration of this very identity: He is the One in whom being and essence coincide perfectly, absolutely, and necessarily.

The scriptural grounding of aseity is both pervasive and explicit. The divine name of Exodus 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM”, is its most compact declaration. Psalm 90:2 gives it its most majestic poetic expression: “Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (NASB 1995). The declaration is not merely that God has existed for a very long time; it is that God is, that His existence is not measured by the mountains or the earth but precedes them, and that the “you are” of the eternal present is the only adequate verb for the One who is Being itself. And John 5:26 provides the most precise New Testament formulation: “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (NASB 1995). The Father’s life in Himself, His underived, self-existent, inexhaustible life, is the essence of aseity, and the same property is ascribed to the Son in virtue of His eternal generation from the Father.

## **II. God’s Self-Sufficiency: He Does Not Need Creation, the Church, or Human Worship**

Aseity is the most fundamental statement of what God is in His own being; self-sufficiency is its immediate and necessary implication in relation to everything outside Himself. If God exists from Himself and through Himself, then it follows with inexorable logic that He does not need anything outside Himself for any aspect of His being, His happiness, His glory, or His completeness. He is perfectly, infinitely, eternally sufficient in Himself. Creation did not add anything to Him. The church does not provide Him with something He lacked. Our worship does not supply a need in God that would otherwise go unmet.

Paul’s speech on the Areopagus in Acts 17 contains the most direct and most pastoral New Testament statement of divine self-sufficiency:

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human

hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.”, Acts 17:24–25, NASB 1995

Paul’s declaration is breathtaking in its scope. The God who made the world and all things in it, including, implicitly, every hand that has ever been extended in worship, every breath that has ever been drawn in prayer, every gift that has ever been laid on an altar, is not served by human hands “as though He needed anything.” The Greek phrase *hōsper tinos prosdeomenos*, as if needing something, as if lacking something, carries a deliberate note of negation: God is not in a position of deficiency that our service supplies. He is the One who gives to all life and breath and all things. The direction of the giving runs only one way: from God to creature, not from creature to God.

Psalm 50:10–12 reinforces this truth with a sustained and almost ironic divine speech:

“For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains.”, Psalm 50:10–12, NASB 1995

The hypothetical “If I were hungry” is itself a theological declaration: God is not hungry. He does not lack. The entire created order, every mountain, every valley, every creature, every resource, belongs to Him and is, in a sense, already at His disposal. What could we bring to Him that He has not already given us to bring? What need could we meet in Him that His own infinite being has not already perfectly satisfied? The Psalmist’s point is not that sacrifices are worthless; it is that their value consists entirely in the obedience and gratitude they express, not in any supply they make to a deficient God.

This truth has enormous implications for how we understand the relationship between God and creation, God and the church, and God and human worship, implications we will draw out in detail in the sections that follow.

### **III. The Fullness of the Intra-Trinitarian Life: Self-Sufficient Communion**

One of the most profound questions that aseity raises, and one of the most beautiful answers that the doctrine of the Trinity provides, is this: If God is perfectly self-sufficient and needs nothing outside Himself, does the affirmation that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) imply that God somehow needed to create beings to love in order to be fully and truly God? Does the assertion that God is relational and personal require a creation to be relational with and personal toward?

The answer of Trinitarian theology is a resounding and glorious no. The God of Scripture is not a lonely monad who created the universe to satisfy a relational deficit in His own being. He is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who from all eternity has existed in a perfect, self-sufficient, inexhaustibly full communion of love, knowledge, delight, and glory within the eternal life of His own triune being. The Father has loved the Son from before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). The Son dwells in the Father’s bosom (John 1:18). The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in an

eternal movement of divine life and love. There is no loneliness in the Godhead, no relational vacuum that creation fills, no love without an object prior to the act of creation.

This truth was expressed with great precision and pastoral beauty by the Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield, who observed that the doctrine of the Trinity is what makes it possible to say that God is love in an absolute and eternal sense, not merely in a temporal and contingent sense. If God were a monad, a single, undifferentiated divine Person, then before creation there was no object of love, and God's love would be a quality that only became actual when He created something to love. But the triune God has never been without an object of love: the Father has eternally loved the Son, the Son has eternally loved the Father, and the Spirit is, in the language of Augustine, the very Love that flows between them. God's love is not constituted by creation; it is expressed in creation. The overflow of an eternal and self-sufficient love produces the world; the world does not produce that love.

Jonathan Edwards captures this insight with characteristic rhetorical luminosity when he describes creation as an emanation and remanation of God's own infinite fullness, not an addition to it, but a joyful, free overflowing of it. The creation of the universe is not the act of a God who finally finds something to fill a void; it is the act of a God whose eternal fullness spills over, as it were, into the display of His own glory in creatures who can know and enjoy and reflect that glory. He creates not because He needs to, but because He is the kind of God He is, infinitely good, infinitely generous, infinitely rich in the internal fullness of His triune life.

#### **IV. The Freedom of Creation: God Created Not Out of Need but Out of Goodness**

The aseity and self-sufficiency of God establish what theologians call the freedom of creation: God was under no compulsion, no internal need, and no external constraint when He created the universe. Creation is a free act of sovereign, unconstrained divine will, the voluntary overflow of divine goodness and the deliberate display of divine glory, not the necessary expression of a divine deficiency or a cosmic accident driven by impersonal forces.

This freedom of creation stands in sharp contrast to several alternative accounts of the relationship between God and the world. In certain forms of Neoplatonic philosophy, the world emanates from the divine necessarily, as light necessarily radiates from the sun, such that God cannot not create, and the created order is the inevitable and necessary expression of the divine being. On this account, creation is not a free act; it is a metaphysical necessity. The Christian doctrine of aseity, by contrast, insists that the creation of the world was a free and sovereign act of God's will, not a necessity of His nature. The world might not have existed; God would have been no less God without it.

In process theology, the twentieth-century movement associated with Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, and developed theologically by figures such as John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, God is depicted as genuinely dependent upon the world for aspects of His own experience and becoming. God, on this account, is enriched by the world's becoming; He is affected, changed, and in some sense

completed by the responses of His creatures. The process God needs the world in a genuine ontological sense: He grows and changes through His engagement with creation, and the world is the theatre not merely of His glory but of His own ongoing development. The classical doctrine of aseity is the direct and complete refutation of this view: the God who has life in Himself (John 5:26), who is Lord of heaven and earth and needs nothing (Acts 17:24–25), who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NASB 1995), is not enriched by creation, not changed by His engagement with it, and not dependent upon it for any aspect of His perfection or blessedness.

Why, then, did God create? If not from need, then from what motive? The Westminster Larger Catechism gives the most concise and scripturally faithful answer: God created “for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness” (WLC, Q. 26). The primary motive of creation is not the fulfillment of a divine need but the display of a divine reality, the free, sovereign, joyful decision of the self-sufficient God to make a world in which His inexhaustible perfections would be known, enjoyed, and celebrated by creatures made to know and enjoy and celebrate them. Creation is the stage on which the drama of divine glory is displayed; but the glory being displayed was fully and perfectly present before the stage was built. The One who created for His glory already possessed that glory from all eternity in the fullness of His triune life.

## **V. Implications for Worship: We Bring Nothing to God That He Lacks**

The aseity of God transforms our understanding of worship from the ground up. If God is perfectly self-sufficient, if He is not served by human hands as though He needed anything, then what exactly is worship? What are we doing when we gather to sing His praises, offer our prayers, bring our tithes and offerings, and submit our lives in obedient service? The answer requires the careful demolition of a deeply entrenched but thoroughly mistaken model of worship that pervades much popular religious thinking.

The mistaken model is transactional worship: the idea that worship is essentially a transaction in which the worshipper gives God something He needs or desires, and in return receives from God something the worshipper needs or desires. On this model, the worshipper approaches God as a kind of divine vendor: you give God your time, your praise, your service, your financial contributions, and in return God gives you His presence, His blessing, His protection, His favor. The worshipper is the supplier; God is the consumer. And the implicit corollary is that God has a need that worship supplies, a hunger for praise, a desire for human attention, a longing for the company of His creatures.

The doctrine of aseity exposes this model as both theologically mistaken and spiritually dangerous. God is not a divine vendor. He is not hungry for what we bring; if He were hungry, He would not tell us, for the world is His and all it contains (Psalm 50:12). He does not need our songs, our prayers, our service, our money, or our attendance at worship services to be complete, content, or glorified. He was perfectly complete, perfectly content, and perfectly glorified in the eternal fullness of His triune life before any of us drew a single breath.

What, then, is genuine worship? It is the creature's joyful, grateful, awe-struck response to the revelation of the God who is. It is the overflow of a heart that has seen something of the infinite glory of the self-sufficient God and finds itself compelled, not by duty alone but by the sheer weight of discovered reality, to acknowledge what it has seen, to declare what it knows, and to align its entire existence with the truth it has encountered. Worship does not benefit God by supplying a deficiency; it benefits the worshipper by drawing him into an ever-deeper alignment with the glory that is already infinitely and perfectly present in God Himself.

Paul's doxological climax in Romans 11:35–36, "Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen", is the most succinct possible statement of what genuine worship is. The question of verse 35 is the aseity question: Who has given to God first, such that God is in a position of obligation to repay? The answer is no one. Everything that exists, including every act of worship, every prayer, every song, every sacrifice, is already derived from Him, exists through Him, and is directed back to Him. Worship is the creature returning to its Source what the Source has graciously given it to return. It is pure gift, free of all transactional calculation, because the God to whom it is addressed has no needs that could constitute the basis of a transaction.

## **VI. Implications for Assurance: A Self-Sufficient God Is an Unshakeable Foundation**

The aseity of God is not only the ground of genuine worship; it is also one of the most robust foundations of Christian assurance. The logic runs as follows: if God's faithfulness to His people depended, even in the smallest degree, upon anything in us, our performance, our consistency, our worthiness, our perseverance, our spiritual health, then our assurance would be exactly as reliable as our performance. And since our performance is the performance of finite, fallible, indwelt-by-sin human beings, our assurance would be perpetually fragile, perpetually threatened, and perpetually in need of reassessment.

But the aseity of God means that His faithfulness does not depend on our performance; it depends on His nature. He is the I AM, the self-existent, self-sufficient, immutable God whose character is the most reliable reality in the universe, and whose covenant commitments flow not from the worthiness of those He has committed Himself to but from the inexhaustible depth of His own being. He does not choose to love His people because they are loveable; He loves them because He is love, and His love belongs to His nature, not to their merit. He does not remain faithful to His promises because we give Him sufficient reason to remain faithful; He remains faithful because He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

Malachi 3:6 provides the classic biblical conjunction of divine aseity and human assurance: "I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (NASB 1995). The ground of Israel's preservation, their not being consumed despite their persistent unfaithfulness, is not their own merit, not their repentance, not their religious performance. It is the unchanging character of the God who made them His people. Because He is who He is, and because His being does not change, His

covenant commitments remain in force regardless of the covenant people's consistency in keeping their end of the relationship.

This is the assurance of Romans 8:31–39 in its deepest theological foundation: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” The answer is no one and nothing, and the reason is not the strength of our grip on Christ, but the strength of His grip on us; not the quality of our faithfulness, but the immutability of His nature and the self-sufficiency of His grace. The love of God in Christ Jesus is not contingent upon our worthiness; it flows from the inexhaustible, self-sufficient being of the God who loved us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), who chose us not because of anything foreseen in us, but according to the kind intention of His will (Ephesians 1:5). The Christian's security is as solid as the aseity of God, which is to say, it is absolutely, unconditionally, and eternally secure.

There is also a profound implication for prayer. If God were dependent upon our prayers for anything essential to His purposes, then our failures to pray consistently and faithfully would be catastrophic for those purposes. But God's purposes do not depend upon our prayers in this way; they depend upon His own sovereign will, which is perfectly self-sufficient and which nothing we do or fail to do can ultimately frustrate. This does not make prayer unnecessary, God appoints means as well as ends, and prayer is among the most honored of the means He has appointed for the accomplishment of His purposes. But it does free prayer from the weight of imagining that the outcome of God's redemptive purposes hangs upon our consistency. We pray to a God whose purposes are already settled in His own sovereign will; our prayers are the creaturely form of participation in what He has sovereignly determined to accomplish.

## **VII. The Doxological Response: Worship as the Creature's Return to Its Source**

Having traced the implications of aseity for worship and for assurance, we close with the doxological response that the doctrine properly calls forth. The God who is perfectly self-sufficient, who needs nothing from us, who created the world not from need but from goodness, and whose faithfulness rests upon His own immutable nature, this God is worthy of worship that is entirely free of the self-interest, the transactional calculation, and the performance anxiety that so easily corrupt and diminish our praise.

John Piper, in his influential work *Desiring God*, has pressed the implications of divine aseity for worship with particular force. If God is perfectly happy in Himself, if He is perfectly self-sufficient and needs nothing from us, then the worship He calls us to cannot be offered as a gift that satisfies His need; it can only be offered as the creature's response to a reality that infinitely exceeds it. And the creature's most appropriate response to the infinite, self-sufficient, self-glorifying God is not merely dutiful compliance but genuine, wholehearted, affection-saturated delight. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” The glory of a self-sufficient God is not enhanced by grudging obedience; it is reflected in the joyful, freely given worship of creatures who have seen what He is and find themselves irresistibly drawn to declare it.

This is the worship that Paul calls for at the end of Romans 11. Having declared that from God and through God and to God are all things, he does not append a list of required religious observances; he bursts into praise: “To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” The doxology is not a transaction; it is a recognition. It is the creature acknowledging what is already and will always be true: that the glory is His, from beginning to end, and that the only fitting response of a creature who has seen even a fraction of that glory is to add its own small, grateful, joyful voice to the eternal song.

The aseity of God is, in the end, not a cold metaphysical abstraction but a warm and liberating pastoral truth. It frees us from the exhausting project of trying to make ourselves worthy of a God who needs us. It frees worship from the anxiety of wondering whether we have done enough to merit divine attention. It grounds our assurance in the unshakeable rock of the divine being rather than in the shifting sands of our own performance. And it calls us to the most joyful, the most free, and the most pure form of worship that a creature can offer: the worship of the God who needs nothing from us, wants nothing from us except the return of what He has already given us, our whole selves, our whole love, our whole lives, directed back to Him in the glad acknowledgment of who He is and what He has done.

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## Key Texts (NASB 1995)

### Acts 17:24–25

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.”

### Exodus 3:14

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’”

### John 5:26

“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.”

### Psalms 50:10–12

“For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains.”

## Theological Terms and Definitions

| Term                                | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aseity (A Se)</b>                | From the Latin a se, “from Himself.” The divine attribute affirming that God exists entirely from and of Himself, without origin, without cause, and without dependence on anything outside His own being. The most foundational of the incommunicable attributes, directly declared in the divine name I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:14) and in John 5:26 (“The Father has life in Himself”).                                                        |
| <b>Incommunicable Attributes</b>    | Those divine perfections that belong exclusively to God and cannot be shared with or possessed by any creature, even in a derivative or analogical form. Includes aseity, immutability, eternity, omnipresence, and omniscience. Distinguished from the communicable attributes (love, holiness, wisdom, justice) which God, in some derived measure, imparts to His image-bearers.                                                             |
| <b>Communicable Attributes</b>      | Those divine perfections that God shares, in a finite and derivative form, with His image-bearers. Includes love, holiness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and faithfulness. Creatures can be loving, holy, wise, and just in a creaturely way; they cannot be self-existent, immutable, or omniscient. The distinction between incommunicable and communicable attributes is not absolute but heuristic.                                           |
| <b>Necessary Being</b>              | A being whose non-existence is impossible, one who exists not because certain conditions happen to be in place, but because existence belongs to His very nature. God alone is necessary being. All created things are contingent beings: they might not have existed and could in principle cease to exist if not sustained by a power outside themselves.                                                                                     |
| <b>Contingent Being</b>             | A being whose existence is dependent on something outside itself, one that might not have existed and which exists only because certain conditions are in place and are continuously maintained. Every creature is a contingent being, dependent upon God’s creative act for its existence and upon His sustaining power for its continuation in being.                                                                                         |
| <b>Self-Sufficiency (Autarkeia)</b> | The divine perfection that flows from aseity: God is perfectly complete in Himself and lacks nothing. He does not need creation, the church, human worship, or any creaturely action to supplement His being, happiness, or glory. Acts 17:24–25 is the primary New Testament declaration. Distinguished from, but grounded in, aseity: aseity is about the source of God’s existence; self-sufficiency is about the completeness of His being. |
| <b>Freedom of Creation</b>          | The theological principle that God created the universe by a free, sovereign, unconstrained act of will, not from internal necessity, not from external compulsion, and not from any deficiency in His own being. The freedom of creation is grounded in divine aseity: because                                                                                                                                                                 |

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| <b>Process Theology</b>       | <p>God needs nothing, His creation of the world is a free overflow of His goodness, not a necessary satisfaction of a divine need.</p> <p>A twentieth-century theological movement (associated with Whitehead, Hartshorne, Cobb, Griffin) that depicts God as genuinely dependent upon the world for aspects of His own experience and becoming. God, on this view, grows, changes, and is enriched by the world's responses. Directly contradicts the classical doctrine of divine aseity and immutability. Represents a fundamental departure from biblical and classical Christian theism.</p> |
| <b>Transactional Worship</b>  | <p>A mistaken model of worship in which the worshipper gives God something He needs (praise, service, obedience) in exchange for something the worshipper needs (blessing, presence, protection). Implicitly assumes that God has a deficiency that worship supplies. Refuted by aseity: God does not need our worship and is not enriched by it; genuine worship is the creature's joyful response to the self-sufficient God, not a transaction that meets His needs.</p>                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Intra-Trinitarian Life</b> | <p>The eternal life of perfect love, knowledge, delight, and glory that the three Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, share within the divine being, prior to and independent of all creation. The intra-Trinitarian life is the ground of God's self-sufficiency in love: God is love not because He needs creatures to love, but because the Father has eternally loved the Son, the Son the Father, and the Spirit flows as the bond of their eternal love.</p>                                                                                                              |

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## Practical Application

### A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that God is the one Being in all of reality who owes His existence to nothing and no one other than Himself, the I AM WHO I AM, the self-existent, self-sufficient, perfectly complete God who was infinitely and eternally glorious before the first star was lit. We must believe that creation did not add anything to His perfection, that our worship does not supply any deficiency in Him, and that His faithfulness to us rests upon His own nature rather than upon our merit. We must also believe, on the positive side of this doctrine, that the self-sufficiency of God is the ground of creation's freedom: He created because He chose to, in the overflowing generosity of His trinitarian love, for the display of His glory and the good of the creatures He would make. And we must believe that the God who needs nothing from us nonetheless freely chooses to receive our worship, to hear our prayers, and to covenant Himself to us in love, and that this free choice is itself the most staggering display of grace in the universe.

### B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The doctrine of aseity should produce a profound and liberating freedom in our devotional life. If God does not need our worship, then our worship can finally be what it

is supposed to be: free. Free from the anxiety of wondering whether we have done enough. Free from the transactional calculation of how much praise will purchase how much blessing. Free from the performance anxiety that turns corporate worship into a religious production and personal devotion into a guilt-management exercise. The God who needs nothing from us invites us to give Him everything, not because He requires it to be complete but because He is worthy of it and because the giving of it is our own deepest good. Let the aseity of God free your worship into the joyful, unanxious, whole-hearted expression it was always designed to be.

### C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

1. **Audit your worship for transactional assumptions.** Ask yourself honestly: Do I approach God as a vendor whose goods I am seeking to purchase with my religious performance? Do I give to God in order to get? Do I pray with the implicit assumption that God owes me a response because of the quality or quantity of my prayer? The doctrine of aseity calls every one of these assumptions into question. God is not in your debt. He is not enriched by your worship. He is not compelled by your prayer. He gives freely, and the right response to that giving is free, uncalculating love.
2. **Root your assurance in God's nature, not your performance.** When the enemy of your soul assaults your assurance with the record of your failures, inconsistencies, and spiritual weakness, answer not with a defense of your performance but with the declaration of God's nature: I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed (Malachi 3:6). The ground of your standing before God is not what you have done but who He is. His faithfulness does not fluctuate with your spiritual thermometer; it is as constant as His being.
3. **Worship with freedom and delight, not duty and anxiety.** Let the aseity of God be the liberation of your worship. If He needs nothing from you, then what you give Him is pure gift, and a gift freely given in response to infinite grace is the purest and most joyful form of worship possible. Pursue the "free worship" that aseity makes possible: singing not to be heard but because He is worthy; praying not to inform but because communion with the self-sufficient God is itself the deepest human good; giving not to purchase but because generosity is the imitation of the God who gave everything without needing anything in return.
4. **Meditate on the intra-Trinitarian life as the ground of all love.** The self-sufficiency of God's love is not a cold abstraction; it is the most warming truth in theology. God did not create us because He was lonely; He created us out of the overflow of an eternal, triune love that was already perfectly complete in the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You were not created to meet a divine need; you were created to participate in and reflect a divine love that was already, before you existed, the most beautiful reality in the universe. Let this truth shape your self-understanding and your gratitude.
5. **Pray with confidence grounded in divine sovereignty, not anxious obligation.** Because God's purposes are not dependent upon your prayer performance, you can pray with the confidence of a child petitioning a Father

whose love does not fluctuate with the child's consistency. You can come boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) not because you have earned the right through sufficient piety, but because the God who invites you is the God who needs nothing, and whose invitation is therefore pure grace from beginning to end.

## **D. For Every Season of Life**

For the new believer: The doctrine of aseity is one of the most liberating truths you can internalize early in your Christian life. It means that your standing before God does not depend on your performance. It means that God's love for you is grounded in His own unchanging nature, not in your merit. And it means that your worship, however imperfect and halting, is received by a God who needs nothing from you and yet delights in what you freely give. You cannot bankrupt a self-sufficient God. You cannot exhaust His patience. You cannot disappoint Him beyond the reach of His grace. Rest in the God who is.

For the long-tenured saint: Aseity is the doctrine that rescues seasoned believers from the subtle legalism that grows like barnacles on decades of religious life. If you have begun to think of your long years of service, your consistent prayer life, or your theological knowledge as something God owes you credit for, as a kind of equity you have built up in the divine economy, this doctrine is the corrective. God needs none of it. He was perfectly glorious before you were born. His faithfulness to you is not the reward of your faithfulness to Him; it is the expression of His own immutable nature. Start again, with fresh gratitude, as one who has been given everything and earned nothing.

For the one who is suffering: When you are in the valley and God feels absent, when your prayers seem to go unanswered and your worship feels hollow and your faith feels exhausted, the aseity of God is the truth that holds. He does not need your spiritual vitality to be who He is. He does not need your consistent worship to remain faithful. He does not need your strong faith to accomplish His purposes. He IS, with a self-existence that your suffering cannot diminish and a faithfulness that your weakness cannot undermine. The I AM who spoke from the burning bush is the I AM who meets you in your valley, and He is no less who He is for all that your valley has cost you.

For the pastor and teacher: The doctrine of aseity is the theological foundation of joyful, gospel-saturated ministry. If God needs nothing from your congregation, then the goal of ministry is not to meet God's needs through the church's performance; it is to help the church see and know and love the God who needs nothing and yet freely gives everything. Preach this doctrine. Teach the aseity of God. Set the people of God free from the performance-driven, anxiety-producing, transactional religion that is so easy to slip into, and introduce them to the free, joyful, uncalculating worship of the God who was infinitely complete before they ever drew a breath.

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## **Study and Discussion Questions**

## Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, how would you have described what God “gets” out of our worship? Has your answer to that question changed as a result of studying the doctrine of aseity? Share briefly with the group.

## Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read Acts 17:24–25. What two specific claims does Paul make about God in relation to human worship in verse 25? What is the logic connecting verse 24 (God as Creator and Lord of heaven and earth) and verse 25 (God not needing human service)? What does Paul say God gives, in contrast to what humans might think they give to God?

3. Read Psalm 50:7–15. What is the context of this psalm, who is speaking and to whom? What specific misunderstanding about sacrifice does God correct in verses 9–13? What does God actually desire from His people according to verse 14–15? How does the hypothetical of verse 12 (“If I were hungry, I would not tell you”) clarify the nature of God’s relationship to Israel’s sacrifices?

4. Read John 5:24–26. What is the context of Jesus’ declaration in verse 26? What does it mean that the Father has “life in Himself”? What is the significance of the fact that Jesus claims to possess this same self-existent life? How does this declaration relate to the divine name “I AM”?

## Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. Define aseity in your own words. How is the Latin phrase *a se* (“from Himself”) a precise summary of what the divine name “I AM WHO I AM” declares? What is the difference between saying God has “existed for a very long time” and saying God is “self-existent”?

6. Explain the distinction between necessary being and contingent being. Why is God the only necessary being? What would it mean for the doctrine of God if His existence were contingent in any way?

7. How does the doctrine of the Trinity answer the question: If God is perfectly self-sufficient, how can He be said to be love before creation? Why is it significant that God’s love does not depend on creatures for its actuality? What does this reveal about the motivation for creation?

8. What is “transactional worship” and why is it theologically mistaken? How does the aseity of God transform our understanding of what worship actually is and what it is for? If worship does not supply a divine need, whose benefit does it primarily serve, and why?

## Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. In what ways have you approached God in a transactional mode, giving something in order to get something? How might the doctrine of aseity reshape the motivations, the content, and the emotional texture of your personal worship and prayer?

10. Paul declares in Romans 11:35 that no one has “first given to God.” Everything we offer to God in worship was already His before we offered it. How does this truth affect

the way you think about financial giving, service, time invested in prayer, and the offering of your talents and gifts in the service of the church?

**11.** The lesson argues that aseity is the foundation of Christian assurance: God's faithfulness depends on His nature, not on our performance. Is this truth currently functioning as an anchor for your assurance, or do you find yourself grounding your standing before God in your own consistency and spiritual performance? What would it look like to rest your assurance more fully in the self-sufficient and immutable nature of God?

**12.** Reflect on the statement: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." How does the aseity of God make this statement not just psychologically attractive but theologically necessary? If God needs nothing from us, what is the most glorifying thing we can possibly give Him, and how does that reshape the way you pursue your own spiritual life?

## Prayer Focus

Open your prayer by addressing God as He has revealed Himself in His aseity: Lord, You are the I AM, the self-existent, self-sufficient, infinitely complete God who was perfectly glorious before the first star was lit and who will be no less glorious when the last star burns out. You are the Father who has life in Yourself, who dwells in unapproachable light, who is served by no human hands as though You needed anything. We stand before You as creatures who owe You everything and can give You nothing that was not already Yours.

Then pray through the implications: Confess the transactional assumptions that have corrupted your worship, the places where you have approached God as a vendor rather than as Lord, where you have given in order to get rather than given in response to having already received everything. Ask for the freedom that aseity makes possible: the freedom to worship without performance anxiety, to pray without earning it, to give without calculating the return.

Root your assurance in the declaration of Malachi 3:6: I, the LORD, do not change. Let your prayer close with Paul's doxology from Romans 11: For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Let that be the summary of everything: from Him everything came, through Him everything exists, and to Him, freely, joyfully, without reserve, everything is returned. To the self-sufficient, self-existent, triune God be all the glory, now and forever. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**

To God Alone Be the Glory

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## FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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