

- I. Session 23: Thinking about God's Attributes
- a. Purpose: We shall lay the foundation for discussing about God's attributes in the sessions to follow.
 - b. Theological Definitions
 - i. Why are we going over theological definitions? Before we explore God's attributes certain theological terms need to be defined. This is also helpful to know when one move on to further reading in theology.
 - ii. Nature (as in "God's nature"): The essence of God; that which necessarily belongs to God and if God or anything/anyone else lack it, they would not be God.
 - iii. Essence: The same as God's nature.
 - iv. Being: That which has existence.
 - v. Substance: It is the being that has the essence or nature.¹
 - vi. Attributes: "The properties, or qualities ascribed to a substance."²
 - c. Does God have a nature?
 - i. Why are we going over this? Some people think it is nonsensical to talk about God's attributes for various reasons. Some thinks God does not have a nature, or that we can't know His nature and still others think his nature can be anything one believes it to be (and there can not be anything wrong can be said about his nature). But we want to ask the question and see if God's Word assume that God has a nature or not.
 - ii. First off, all things have natures including things and persons that are not God
 1. Satan= "*You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from **his own nature**, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*" (John 8:44)
 - a. Note Satan's sinful nature dictates his sinful speech.
 - b. Satan's sinful nature and person means he is "*a liar and the father of lies*"
 2. Humanity
 - a. "*Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*" (Ephesians 2:3)

Note apart from Christ human nature is sinful and "*by nature children of wrath,*"
 - b. "*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.*" (James 5:17)

¹ John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ:Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 221.

² Ibid.

- i. In the context the writer James was teaching the readers that “*the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*” (James 5:16b)
 - ii. Elijah was given as an example but for the example to be encouraging James point out that Elijah has the same nature as the Christians who was reading the epistle.
 - 3. As we shall see below, God is no different.
- iii. God’s nature is clearly self-evidenced by Himself through His creation: “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and **divine nature**, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*” (Romans 1:20)
 - 1. This verse sufficiently shows God has a nature.
 - 2. Notice the text mentioned God’s “*divine nature*” and not just merely His existence is known through creation.
 - 3. Verbs used to described how well known is the “*divine nature.*”
 - a. “*clearly seen*”
 - b. “*being understood*”
 - c. Those who don’t believe “*are without excuse.*”
- iv. “*Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.*” (Acts 17:29)
 - 1. This is another verse that shows God has a nature.
 - 2. In the context Paul is presenting the Gospel to Greek philosophers in Athens.
 - 3. Notice Paul presupposes that God’s nature can’t be anything you want it to be since it is not “*like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.*”
- v. “*However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.*” (Galatians 4:8)
 - 1. In order for this to make sense this verse presupposes that there is such a thing as God’s nature.
 - 2. Note here that false gods are “*by nature are no gods.*”
 - 3. That is, they lack the characteristics essential to be “gods.”
- vi. “*And He is the radiance of His glory and the **exact representation of His nature**, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*” (Hebrews 1:3)
 - 1. In light of the previous verse in Galatians 4:8 we should note that Hebrews 1:3 establishes Jesus is God.
 - 2. For our argument that Jesus is Divine to work we (us and the author of Hebrews) we argue that Jesus has attributes of God that no creatures have.
 - 3. Thus this is another verse that shows that God has a nature and the importance of God’s nature in theology.

- d. Care is needed in talking about God's attributes
 - i. Be careful of assuming words we use today means the same thing in theology (example: substance in theology is not necessarily substance in today's language that is synonymous with attributes).
 - ii. Be careful that when we talk about God's nature, attributes, etc., that we end up making Him impersonal, or consisting of impersonal parts, etc.
 - iii. Be careful of overemphasizing certain attributes of God and downplaying or neglecting other attributes.
- e. What are the Implications from this lesson?