

BluePrints: Perfection
By Jason Huff
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Genesis 1:1-5, 2:1-3; John 1:1-5; Titus 3:1-7

Friends, our final Scripture reading this evening is from Titus 3:1-7. Let's listen to the Word of God. "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

I guess I'm in a questioning mood. Last week, we asked, "why do we trust the Bible as the basis of truth?" This week, I've got a different question – what is perfection? What does it mean for something to be perfect?

Wednesday morning, I got up at 5:30 in the midst of a storm and the sky was a beautiful red. It was perfect. But according to the old line "red at night, sailor's delight; red at morning, sailors take warning," somebody out there took that red sky not as perfect but as a bad sign.

I love when I walk into a movie and think that it's perfect. Yet I'll read reviews afterwards, and a lot of people dislike what I thought was so amazing. Is perfection just in the eye of the beholder? Or is there a true standard of perfection out there?

According to Scripture – the one standard of truth we trust – God is the plum line, true north, the true definition of perfection. His perfection is the basis for our second essential tenet of faith in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Here it is:

We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things,
infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy
Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!

It's short, but it contains the groundwork we need for our knowledge of God. All of it points to His perfection. If we are to understand our situation, our predicament as humans and how to deal with it, we need to know who God is and what He has done.

So let's start with the very first thought: *we believe in one God*. This seems simple. Everybody these days believes in one God, right? Nope! Christianity, Judaism, and Islam believe in one God, and a few other minor religions. The vast majority of religions throughout time are polytheistic; they believe there are many gods. That includes most tribal and pagan religions, Hinduism, forms of Buddhism, Shinto – almost half the modern world is polytheistic.

In Deuteronomy 4:35, it says the Israelites were led out of Egypt “so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.” Deuteronomy 6:4 is known as the Shema, the most important prayer in Judaism: “Here, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” In Mark 12:29, Jesus taught that the Shema was the most important commandment of all. Knowing there is only one true God is foundational to faith.

Why is it important? It’s because so many other things vie for our attention. In the ancient world, the pagan gods represented human desires – war, riches, sex and fertility, control. But they were simply creations of human imagination, a way to explain the unexplainable and to try and harness power over that which they were powerless. But because God is real, the only Supreme Being, He deserves our full attention and obedience.

The first commandment in the Ten Commandments is, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” This doesn’t mean, “You can have other gods, but I come first.” In the Hebrew, it literally means, “you shall have no other gods before my face.” We aren’t to serve or even acknowledge any of the so-called gods out there. The second command was not to make idols, not even a likeness of God, because God is far greater than any representation. In churches, we can picture Jesus because He came in human likeness – but we still do not attempt to picture the Father.

The wonderful thing about there being only one God, the God known as YHWH, is that we don’t have to divide our loyalties. In the ancient world, it was always a question whom you should serve. Pagans made appeals and sacrifices to multiple gods to make sure they were covered. It was a never-ending cycle of trying to please manmade gods. And countries took their successes as proof of their god’s power. If you lost a conflict, that meant the other guy’s god was greater, and you added that god to your pantheon. Yet there was never a promise that god would hear you or respond – only fear that you would anger them and be struck down.

Israel was never the most powerful nation; it often suffered under whatever superpower was flexing its muscles. Many Jews fell into the same patterns as their neighbors, hedging their bets by worshipping foreign gods. Yet YHWH always came through, restoring His people. As other nations in the ancient Near East came and went, the Hebrews remained. Over time, despite their failings, the Israelites realized that God had been truthful with them. He is the only God. There is no need to pursue after any others. God is in control. Serve Him and you don’t need to serve any other gods. You don’t have to serve the demands of the worlds and its lusts, either.

God is the only God, and He is One. Yet in His perfection, He is also uniquely triune. *God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – as our essential says, He is “eternally existing in three persons.”* This is far beyond what we can understand because we are always locked into ourselves. Even husbands and wives married half a century don’t come close to being truly and completely united with their “soul mate.” But God is completely different from us in this way. We have a beginning in time; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not. We can comprehend how God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only through Scripture, not from our experience.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three separate gods as Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, mistakenly said. If they were, it would break the rule that God is One. At the same time, God is not just wearing masks. God does not just show up sometimes as the Father and sometimes as the Son and sometimes as the Spirit. If God were wearing masks but was just one person, not only would it be deceptive, Scripture would make no sense – it would be crazy for Jesus to pray to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit if they weren't really unique.

They are each distinctive, yet so entirely unified in every way that they are truly One. Scripture shows them working together at the most significant points in human history. In creation, the Father speaks and the entirety of the universe comes into being. The Spirit is there hovering over the deep at the very earliest stage of creation, participating. John 1 says that the Son, Jesus, was always with the Father. Through Jesus, all things were made; not one thing that exists came into existence without His authority. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are jointly responsible for the creation of the universe.

But they are also uniquely engaged in salvation. In Titus, we hear that the Father saves us by the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is poured out on us through Jesus Christ. We were saved from our wretchedness and sin by all three working in tandem. We are justified not by our works but God's mercy and grace. This also means that salvation is not just Jesus' job. The whole of God's very self is engaged with saving us from the power of sin and death. God is unified in saving us, yet each person of the Trinity plays a special role.

It's significant that God is one yet three. He is different from us in some amazing ways. At His very heart, God is relational. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always been and always will be in relationship with one another. God didn't create us because He was lonely or needed us to complete Himself. He has always been complete in and of Himself, in His three persons. He wanted to create us. He wanted to show His love to us.

So let's look a little deeper at other key parts of our essential. *Why is it essential that God made us?* How does science fit into that? Is it important to our faith that God created the universe? Is there some way that science and Christian faith can co-exist?

Christianity supplies answers that science simply can't and won't give. Theologian R.C. Sproul had an ongoing conversation with the late Carl Sagan, the scientist behind the TV series *Cosmos* that's recently been revived. Sproul asked Sagan how something could come from nothing – which science denies ever happens. Sagan had no answer. He asked how far back in time Sagan's research had gone. Sagan boasted that his calculations had tracked the Big Bang to within moments of when he thought it happened. Sproul asked him, “What existed before that? What happened before that?” And Sagan answered, “I don't go there.”

Can you imagine that? One of the leading scientists of the 20th century, Carl Sagan didn't want to go all the way to finding the solution to the issue he spent his life researching. Would a scientist looking for a cure for cancer get 99% of the way and then stop because he was afraid he wouldn't like the answer? People would be infuriated! They would storm his house demanding he finish! Scientists come at their questions with their own beliefs, just like we come at them with our beliefs.

The Bible doesn't tell us the nitty-gritty of how God made everything. Until recently, it wouldn't have made sense to anyone if it did. Scripture doesn't require us to believe that God created everything in a literal six days; His days are different from ours – the Bible states that a thousand years are like a day to God. He could have done it instantaneously or in 144 hours or over millennia. But no matter when or how God did it, Genesis 1 and 2 are adamant that He made everything that exists.

He didn't just make some of it; He didn't just create the earth or our solar system. He created the entirety of the universe to reflect His goodness and perfection. The entire thing speaks to Him. We don't even know how the rotation of particular stars and planets and moons billions of miles away from us affects our part of the universe, but we know that they do. Any one thing out of sync and we could never live here. The whole thing shows us that God has created all of creation with humanity in mind.

Not only did God create everything, He sustains it. This is just as important as God creating it. When we say God sustains the universe, it means that He still exercises His authority and dominion over it. Nothing happens that He doesn't know about. Nothing happens without at least His permission, if not His blessing. Everything in the whole universe would fall apart in an instant if He did not sustain it.

This is more important to you and me than even creation itself. There have been many people in history, including many founding fathers of our country, who were deists. They believed in the watchmaker god – some god created the universe, “wound it up,” and stepped away to watch it run. In this system, we are ultimately in charge of our fate; while we might appreciate the watchmaker god and what he did, he won't do anything for us or change anything.

The problem with the watchmaker god is that he makes no difference. We might as well be atheists if there is a watchmaker god because we can't relate to him in any way, and appealing to him is useless. In a watchmaker god's world, everything that has occurred since that god stepped back is purely by random chance. You and I are not a part of the watchmaker god's plan because that god can't make anything happen. At best, we are happy accidents.

But YHWH created and sustains the universe. He is sovereign. That's a word that we don't hear much, but it means that He is King. Whatever He determines goes. It means that you matter. You are important to God. You don't exist because two people randomly came together whose ancestors just happened to survive the last several millennia. You exist because God worked out every detail along the way so that you would come to be.

The psalmist says, “You knit me together in my mother's womb; I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” God says to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” God created the world, but He also sustains it. He is still in the creating business. He cares for all of His creation even now, and He makes sure that His purposes are carried out throughout time. That means you were made for Him. Because God continues to sustain His creation, you are not an accident. Period. No matter the hardships in your life, no matter the struggles, no matter how much you wrestle with why you are here, you matter to God and were made for a purpose.

That purpose shines through the last phrase of today's essential: "To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!" Our purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. God created everything, He sustains it so that life continues to thrive, and He did it all that His goodness might be on display.

God is perfect. He is omniscient, which means that He knows everything. He is omnipresent, which means that He is everywhere and nothing can be hidden from Him. He is complete in and of Himself. His attributes are perfectly aligned; He is faultless in His love, justice, and mercy. Every trait that we should aspire to is found in perfect measure in Him.

Is it self-centered or self-absorbed for God to want glory from His creation? Absolutely not! If God were any lesser, if He didn't create everything in existence or didn't sustain His creation or wasn't perfect in Himself, then yes, God would be asking for something that wasn't rightfully His. But when God asks for us to glorify Him, we are glorifying all those things that we most love and admire when we see them in our world that come from Him and reflect Him.

When we glorify God, we glorify goodness and rightness and wholeness; we glorify peace and beauty. We glorify service and self-sacrifice, which God showed us in full measure through His Son Jesus and His sacrificial life. The honor we give to God is an acknowledgement not only of Him as a person but the traits that make Him perfect – the traits that, if we would have them in abundance, would make us truly better people.

Our culture glorifies musicians and actors and sports figures who are good at their jobs but are terrible human beings. Occasionally, someone who's done a genuinely good deed is honored. We don't even think twice about that. But when God is honored, we are honoring the one Being who actually deserve praise through and through. It should be a no-brainer.

Now praise isn't just about music, though we call worship music "praise music." Praising and glorifying God happens through our lives. It happens when we turn to Him in Scripture and in prayer, when we come to worship, when we act like His children in our everyday lives, and when we talk about His love to others. All those actions glorify Him.

If you have never really glorified God...if you have never trusted in Him for salvation from sin, turned away from sin, and come to know Him as Savior and Lord...then take that first step today and honor Him as the magnificent Creator, Sustainer, and Savior He is. And if you have, continue to glorify Him more and more. Do it through your time; do it through your talents; do it through your money and possessions. You were made for this.

And the good news is, as we glorify God, we enjoy Him more and more. We enjoy His presence. We enjoy how His traits overflow into our lives as He begins to transform us and make us more like Him. We enjoy His love. Even in the darkest, most painful moments of life, God will be there, and we can find our rest in Him.

Will you believe in the one True God and honor Him for all He's done?