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SESSION 2 | Aseity

Our nature as made in God's image, reflects his communicable attributes directly. This is not the same with the incommunicable attributes. The way we understand these is by saying, "He is unlike us."

As we approach our subject of Aseity or independence, we can say that:

- God is independent.
- God is sufficient in himself.

Your last 24 hours

Think of all the things you've needed in the last 24 hours.

- You needed air
- You needed your heart to beat
- You needed sleep
- You needed food
- You needed strength to get into the car
- You needed wisdom to understand

There is only one being that needs nothing. God is fundamentally different and this should humble us. One of the most elemental points in the doctrine of self-existence: God doesn't need us.

"We have the idea of self-existence or what we call in theology the concept of aseity, when I see that word on a blackboard or a text book, I know that the vast majority of the people in the pew have never heard of the word, and it's so obscure and esoteric that they don't care about the word, but I have to tell you, honestly and personally, I see that word and I get chills up my spine because in that little word is captured all of the glory, of the perfection of God's being. That's what makes God different from you and different from me and different from the stars, the earthquakes, and any creaturely thing. [The difference] is that God and God alone has aseity. He and he alone exists by his own power."
—R.C. Sproul

I. DEFINING ASEITY

Aseity comes from the two latin words, "A"—from, and "se"—oneself.

"Aseity (from the Latin a se, "from itself") is nuanced in a variety of ways, but the main idea of aseity is that God depends on nothing other than himself for his existence." — John S. Feinberg

"'Aseity' comes from the Latin aseite, meaning literally "of oneself." Used by God, it denotes that He exists in and of Himself, independent of anything else. He is self-existent

... The biblical basis for God's aseity is found in the facts that 1) He existed prior to and independent of creation and that 2) He brought into and sustains in existence everything else that is." —Normal Geisler

"In Christian theology this attribute of God was called his independence (αὐτάρκεια), aseity, all-sufficiency, greatness. In the East, a number of terms were used: 'God, without beginning or cause, unbegotten', and theologians preferably spoke of God as 'the self-generate', 'self-begotten', 'self-existent', 'self-divine', 'self-luminous', 'self-wise', 'self-virtuous', 'self-excellent', and so on. All that God is, he is of himself." —Herman Bavinck

See a pattern here?

The ground of God's being and existence is his own self. No one brought him to be, he simply exists in his own being.

Psalm 50:10-12

For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.

Is God his own cause?

"The term self-caused (causa sui) sometimes used as another synonym [to aseity, independence and self-sufficiency] is misleading. Since efficient causation requires some priority of the cause to the effect, nobody can literally bring about his own existence." — John Frame

God is uncaused. Nothing in Scripture refers to a cause for God. Everything else can be worked back to creation. Not God.

"Though God is uncaused, he is the cause of all other existing things." —John S. Feinberg

Psalm 90:2

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

John 8:58

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

John 1:1, 3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Acts 17:25

And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

He is not caused, rather, he is the cause to all things.

"Aseity may be called the primary attribute of God's being" —Herman Bavinck

"Aseity (aseitas, from ens a se) is that divine attribute in virtue of which God exists by Himself, in Himself, and through Himself." —Joseph Pohle (Roman Catholic theologian, we wouldn't agree with all of what he would say, but this quote is pretty solid)

"Theologians have usually treated aseity as a metaphysical attribute, that is, one that focuses on the independence of God's being over against other beings. It seems to me, however, that the same basic concept is equally important in the epistemological and ethical areas. That is to say, God is not only self-existent, but also self-attesting and self-justifying. He not only exists without receiving existence from something else, but also gains his knowledge only from himself (his nature and his plan) and serves as his own criterion of truth. And his righteousness is self-justifying, based on the righteousness of his own nature and on his status as the ultimate criterion of rightness." —John Frame

What aseity truly represents is not God's essence, but the mode of his essence. It means his essence has not been caused — completely different to ours. God's self-existence also denotes pureness of being. Since he is from himself, he is not corrupted or diluted, his essence is pure and simple.

"All of God does all of what God does."

God is being. We have being.

This makes us different — not slightly different, but all-together, in another category different.

God is.

He simply is.

We are given existence as a gift.

Isaiah 40:15, 16

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.

All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

Pause and ponder: what is it that we're studying, what does this imply for us?

"God, above whom there is nothing, outside of whom there is nothing, apart from whom there is nothing: supreme life, supreme truth, supreme blessedness, supreme wisdom, supreme being." —Augustine

II. YHWH, THE NAME

The most monumental of all introductions: God presents himself as YHWH.

Exodus 3:13-15

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

God tells us his name so that we can have a relationship with him.

The fullest extent of the knowledge of God is encapsulated in YHWH. This is who he is.

God's names declare his attributes

In God's case, his names reveal who he is, they reveal his essence. And YHWH is his preferred proper name, his essential title.

"He is who he is, the same yesterday, today, and forever. ... the God of your fathers ... God does not simply call himself 'the One who is' and offer no explanation of his aseity, but states expressly what and how he is. ... He is unchangeable in his grace, in his love, in his assistance, who will be what he is because he is always himself." —Herman Bavinck

"YHWH was the name that described his essence par excellence. God was the Existent One. His whole identity was wrapped up in the name: 'I will be what I will be' ... All been is contained in him. He is a boundless ocean of being." —Herman Bavinck

"'I Am Who I Am' This mysterious phrase is often understood as "a statement of his aseity—of the fact that he is unconditional, essential being," (Niehaus, God at Sinai, 188; compare Childs, Exodus, 60–64) because of its derivation from the verb "to be" (הָיָה, hayah)." —The Lexham Bible Dictionary

Aseity underlines the name of God.

III. SO WHAT

Seven big implications regarding God's aseity.

- God owns all things. (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12)
- Everything possessed by creatures comes from God (Jam 1:17; Ps. 146:5-6)
- When we give something back to God, we give him only what he has first given us. (Lk. 12:42)
- When we give something back to God, he is not obligated to recompense us. (Lk. 17:10)
- God owes nothing to any creature. (Job 41:11)
- God has no needs. (Ps. 50:8-15)
- God is by nature a se, from himself. (Rom. 11:36)

How does God's aseity affect our day to day?