

The Strange and Wonderful Attributes of God

Lesson #3 – God’s Actuality & Aseity ²³⁰³

With this lesson we are covering two attributes of God that are often confused with each other since they seem to overlap. They are important attributes of God and fundamental to His nature.

I. Definition of God’s Actuality & Aseity

A. God’s Actuality:

God’s “actuality” is defined as: God exists as He is with no possibility to be otherwise. This means that God actually does exist and nothing within the created orders (creation of the angelic hosts and/or the creation of the universe) can have any effect on His existence.

Short version: God necessarily exists.

The God of Scripture is the first cause of all things.

1st Spiritual beings, (Angels including demonic angels from the fall) and

2nd The universe (matter, energy, dimensions of the universe, time, and all of the laws of physics).

Nothing that was created has any authority or dominion or capacity to forcefully affect God in any way. Any effect on God is only possible if God chose to be affected. He is not **contingent** on anything, making Him entirely “Sovereign” (to be covered in **lesson #13**) and “Immutable” (to be covered in **lesson # 21**).

Scripture best describes God by His existential name:

Ex 3:13-15 *Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?"*

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.'" ¹⁵*God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons 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 this is My memorial-name to all generations.

“YHWH” is the “Tetragrammaton” generally translated as Jehovah, Yahweh, or LORD in most Bibles.

Contingent – Something happens because it is derived from or caused by circumstances, conditions, or events that precede it. Everything in the created orders is contingent on some individual thing preceding it.

We commonly call this “cause and effect”. The effect is contingent on the preceding cause. Within our universe, this is universally true, namely that everything that we observe to happen or to exist had a contingent cause. God is the **non-contingent first cause**. He is the first mover. He is the Creator. Nothing in either of His two creations exists without His will and purpose being the first cause.

B. God’s Aseity:

God’s “Aseity” is defined as: His being self-existent, not needing any source or origin. He exists by necessity and there is no possibility of Him not existing. All things that exist, exist because of God’s decree that it should exist.

Short Version: God is self-existent.

The evidence of God’s self-existence is in the work of His hands. The created orders and the creatures, all point to a first cause that is entirely independent from and transcendent over those creations. Nothing that we can see, touch, hear, or imagine can have any effect on God, on His purpose, on His existence, or on His Sovereign dominion over all that belongs to Him.

II. Categorical Discussions:

Is this an Existential or a Relational Category? These two attributes, Actuality and Aseity, are **Existential** attributes, meaning that they are independent of any other thing, but exist in God because of the nature of His Being. Look at Lesson #1, 1st & 2nd definitions near the bottom of page 2.

Is this an Incommunicable or a Communicable Category? These two attributes, Actuality and Aseity, are **Incommunicable** attributes. We do not share these attributes with God because we are but creatures. We

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cannot contain within us that high degree of independence from all things, because we are dependent on many things in this life. But - - -

Note: “In Christ” we Christians are ultimately dependent on nothing except Christ Himself.

Problem Statement:

Without a degree of understanding of these two attributes, we often imagine God as something like an elderly man of great excellence. We miss the severity of His holiness. He is perceived to be like us, only a much, much better version of us. This is a weak and common God, not the God of Scriptures. Our God is altogether different than we are. He is alien to us, and often can be terrifying to face.

We must understand that without God, nothing would exist. Since there are angels and since there is a universe and all that it contains, it follows that there must be a **prime mover, a creator, a first cause** that brought all that exists, outside of Himself, into existence.

God never didn't exist! **God necessarily exists – This we refer to as His Actuality.**

We must also understand that this God of creation exists without dependence on anything beyond Himself. He has no inherent need of anything outside of Himself. The created order is entirely His for His own purpose, for His own good pleasure, for the demonstration of His own glory. We were created to worship and praise Him for His own nature and to reflect His own glory.

God exists perfectly and completely within Himself! **God is self-existent – This we refer to as His Aseity.**

III. Logic and Importance of God's Actuality (God necessarily exists) & Aseity (God is self-existent)

Since God has these transcendent attributes that exceed any possible human knowledge or understanding, shouldn't we marvel at God? Shouldn't we be astounded at His nature? Shouldn't our worship contain much mystery and thirst to know more?

An evidence of God's existence and special revelation of Him to us through Scripture are these very attributes. How could man invent a God with attributes such as these that do not relate to anything that man could possibly even imagine??? The identification of these attributes that could not possibly exist in the mind of natural man shows that this kind of information must have come from outside of the mind of men.

The universe is a “cause and effect” entity. If we see an effect (a dead bird for example), we know with certainty that the dead bird is an effect and something “caused” the bird to die. We may not know how the bird died, but we are certain that there was a cause. Killed by another creature, old age, chemical toxicity, lightning, injury by collision, heat or cold, starvation, microbial attack, etc.

Since God is the Creator of all things, matter, energy, space, time, the laws of physics, rocks, soil, plants, animals, humans, etc. then these things did not exist before He created them. God is not part of this creation of His, therefore He transcends these things, and since God is eternal, then there must not be, cannot be any cause to which He is an effect. e.g. He is not contingent, but rather by His own nature, He necessarily exists without the need of any other thing. He is always and forever, **the First Cause** of everything ever created!

Consequences of Actuality (God necessarily exists) & Aseity (God is self-existent):

- All reality is based in God's existence. Not just spiritual reality, but physical reality also.
- God has no origin and no beginning. There never was a time when He did not exist, nor will there be a time when He will not exist.
- God didn't come from anywhere or from anything. His existence is independent of all causes. God is the **primal cause, the first cause** of all that exists.
- God's existence, His attributes, His character are the ultimate reality, the origin of all that exists.
- God does not exist in a sequential order of events. All things are known by Him from eternity past to eternity future.
- God is in no way subject to time. Time is His creation. Time serves Him in all ways at all times. He is outside of time and thus time has no influence over God. He is not subject to time.

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Historicity of Actuality (God necessarily exists) & **Aseity** (God is self-existent) as **Doctrine**: Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) along with other Church Fathers and Reformation Fathers wrote extensively on the doctrine of God's pure Actuality and Aseity.

IV. Scriptural Basis of God's Actuality & Aseity (God is self-existent)

Some verses pertinent to this goal of knowing of God's Actuality & Aseity

Ex 3:14-15 *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.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons 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 this is My memorial-name to all generations.*

Note: "I AM WHO I AM" is the name for God in the Hebrew. It is referred to as the "Tetragrammaton" name of God, which is transliterated as "JHWH" (pronounced "Yahweh") or "JHVH" ^{German} and written in English as "Jehovah" or "LORD" in English Bibles. This is the unspeakable name for God referred to by rabbinical sources as The Name, or The Great and Terrible Name, or The Unutterable Name, or The Ineffable Name, or The Holy Name, or The Distinguished Name. (occurs 6828X in OT)

"Ineffable" means: Beyond expression, indescribable, or unspeakable. Not to be uttered.

Ps 50:10-12 *Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before Me. I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. 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. Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High; call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."*

Ps 90:1-2 *LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or you gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*

Isa 40:21-28 *Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²²It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. ²³He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. ²⁴Scarcely have they been planted, scarcely have they been sown, scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, but He merely blows on them, and they wither, and the storm carries them away like stubble. ²⁵"To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?" says the Holy One.*

²⁶*Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing.*

²⁷*Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God"? ²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.*

Acts 17:24-26 *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;*

Rom 11:33-36 *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.*

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Col 1:15-17 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

V. Important Points About God's Actuality (God necessarily exists) & Aseity (God is self-existent)

1st How God's Actuality & Aseity Relates to Other Attributes

God's Actuality (necessarily exists) and Aseity (self-existence) ground God as not dependent on anything in His creation. God is the GREAT "I AM".

His other attributes are seen in the light of these attributes. God is Holy and perfect in His self-existence and in His necessity. You could replace the word "Holy" with any of His other attributes such as God is "Sovereign" and perfect in His self-existence and in His necessity. All other attributes likewise are an essential part of His "self-existence and His necessity. E.g. His actuality is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly loving, perfectly wrathful, perfectly just, perfectly righteous, perfectly good, etc. etc.

2nd Why God's Actuality & Aseity are Important to Our Faith

These two attributes should teach us important elements of how we are to relate to God. We can ask God for good things, but we must understand that there is no way to negotiate with God as in a "*quid pro quo*". He has no need of anything that we can provide to Him.

His decrees are solitary to Himself. He does not negotiate with His created things. His purpose is His only purpose. He does not consult with anyone, nor does He need any advice.

God has no need of man, and yet He has chosen to set His love upon each of His redeemed specifically. This love is a love of divine commitment to those whom He has chosen to love.

3rd Confessions or Creeds that Address God's Actuality & Aseity

The Westminster & the 1689 London Baptist Confession; Chapter 2, Article 1 and 2 say that:

See 1689 London Baptist Confession Handout

4th Heresies that Deny God's Actuality & Aseity

Dualism, Deism, Mormonism, Liberal Theologians & many Evangelical Churches no longer believe or teach these doctrines of God's nature.

Important Quotes About God's Actuality & Aseity

The name that God gives to Moses - "I AM WHO I AM" - is a revelation of God's utter and complete self-sufficiency. It is a revelation of God's Aseity. He alone is of Himself. God, and only God is dependent on nothing. And this means, for Moses and for Israel, that God is not dependent on Pharaoh's cooperation to accomplish what He has promised. The name of God - "I AM" - is the root form of the name Yahweh. John Calvin rightly says that this name is given to us in the Old Testament "that our minds may be filled with admiration as often as His incomprehensible essence is mentioned." That "incomprehensible essence," given in the name Yahweh, is mentioned more than five thousand times in the Old Testament.

Dr. K. Scott Oliphint; *Tabletalk*, 1/16; p. 13

How vastly different is the God of Scripture from the "god" of the average pulpit! Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different from that of the Old; how could it be, seeing that both have one and the same author! There too we read "*Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords: Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honour and power everlasting, Amen*" (1 Tim 6:16). Such an one is to be revered, worshipped, adored. He is solitary in His majesty, unique in His excellency, peerless in His perfections. He sustains all, but is Himself independent of all. He gives to all, but is enriched by none.

A. W. Pink; *The Attributes of God*; p. 12