

CENTERED ON GOD

- ▣ We'll explore 5 distinctives of Reformed Theology.
- ▣ The first distinctive is its God-centeredness.
- ▣ We'll focus on 3 assertions centered around God that forms the basis for Reformed Theology:
 - God is incomprehensible
 - God is Self-Sufficient
 - God is Holy

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- ▣ 1) God is Incomprehensible
 - We do not (because we cannot) have a comprehensive knowledge of God.
 - It's not a merely a matter of lack of information but rather a difference in *kind* that makes complete knowledge unattainable.

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- ▣ Gnostics (*Gk. gnosis, “knowledge”*) – believed you can't know God at all unless you are of the *Gnostikoi (“those in the know”)* who supposedly have a mystical, gifted knowledge
- ▣ They attempted to supplant the authority of the Apostles.
- ▣ They asserted that since we and God are *utterly* dissimilar beings, there is no way of discourse between us and God.

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- ▣ Is this what the Scriptures say?
 - The Bible says we were made in the image of God.
 - This doesn't mean that we are little gods, but that we have some degree of likeness, whatever that may be, that makes communication possible.
 - Examples: power, knowledge, emotion, etc.
 - Therefore we are both similar and dissimilar from God at the same time; God is known to us and unknown to us at the same time.
 - Deut. 29:29 states: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

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- ▣ 2) God is Self-sufficient
 - *aseity* – the idea that God and God alone is the ground of his own being
 - He derives his being from nothing outside of himself. He is self-existent.
 - God is Pure Being. Supreme Being. And we are human beings.
 - Our being depends on God's power of being. We are creatures and by definition, a creature owes its existence to its Creator.

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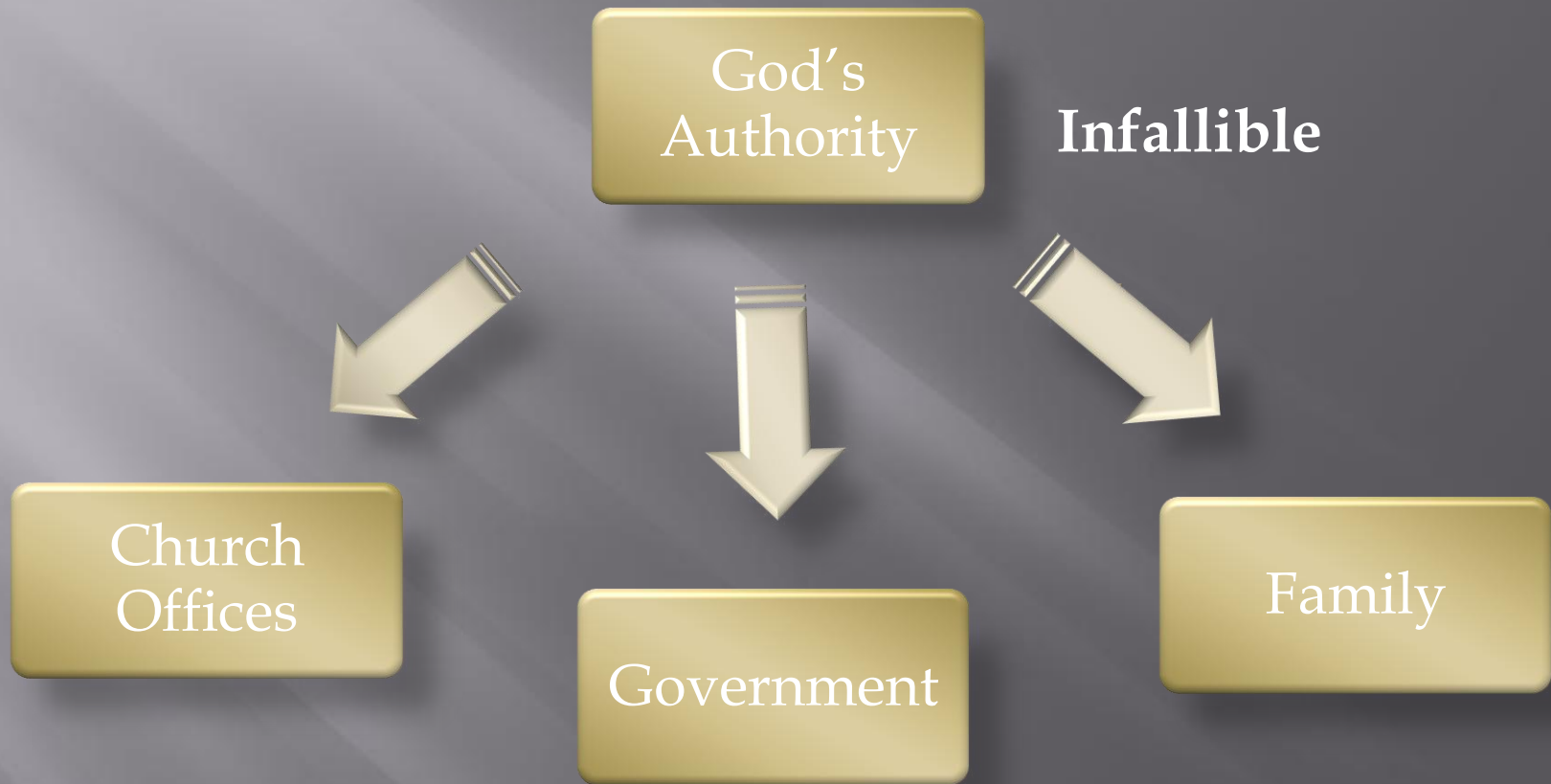
▣ 3) God is Holy

- This calls attention to God's "otherness"
- He's set apart in his greatness, purity, righteousness, perfection, and glory.
- John Calvin: "Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God."
- R.C. Sproul: "Any distortion of the character of God poisons the rest of our theology. The ultimate form of idolatry is humanism, which regards man as the measure of all things."

BASED ON GOD'S WORD

- ▣ The second distinctive of Reformed Theology is its commitment to God's Word alone.
- ▣ Martin Luther: “Unless I am convinced by Sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I will not recant. My conscience is held captive by the *Word of God* and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe.”
- ▣ Protestants did recognize other forms of authority: church offices, civil magistrates, and church creeds and confessions. But these forms of authority are all derived from and subordinate to the authority of God.

BASED ON GOD'S WORD



fallible

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- ❑ Misconception: Reformers believed in Scripture's infallible authority while Roman Catholic church only believed in the authority of the church.
- ❑ The real question is: "Is the Bible the *only* infallible source of special revelation?"
- ❑ Roman Catholics taught that there are two sources of infallible special revelation: Scripture *and* *tradition*.
- ❑ Therefore, they wouldn't let anyone interpret the Bible in a way contrary to tradition. This is precisely what Luther did, which ultimately led to his excommunication.

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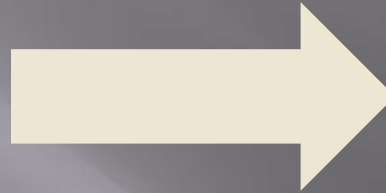
- ▣ Reformers held to a high view of the Bible's inspiration. They considered the Bible to be the Word of God (*verbum Dei*) or the voice of God (*vox Dei*).
- ▣ What then does this say about all the different authors of the Bible? What does inspiration actually mean?
- ▣ The authors' individual styles *remain intact*. The inspiration of the Bible refers to the *divine superintendence* of Scripture, preserving it from the intrusion of human error.

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- ▣ What's the difference between the words infallible and inerrant?
- ▣ **Infallibility** = Because it is inspired by God, it is *incapable* of making an error or failing. It cannot err.
- ▣ **Inerrancy** = It does not err.
- ▣ In other words, infallibility describes ability or potential. It describes something that cannot happen. Inerrancy describes actuality.

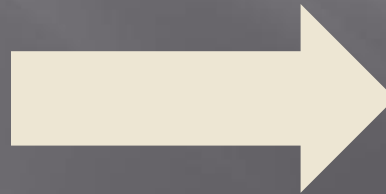
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“To err is human”



Humans make mistakes.

“To be human is to err”



If you're human, you must make mistakes.

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- ▣ So what makes God's infallible?
- ▣ We attribute infallibility to God and his work because of his *nature* and *character*.
- ▣ With respect to His *nature*, he is omniscient (all-knowing). With respect to his *character*, he is holy and all-righteous.
- ▣ What may we conclude from this?

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- ▣ Consider these two cases:
- ▣ 1) If God is holy but limited in knowledge, then: he would err; these would be honest mistakes. He wouldn't be lying because a lie is about intention. He's all-righteous and didn't intend to lie; He just made an honest mistake because he's not all-knowing.
- ▣ 2) If God is all-knowing, but evil, then: He can't make a mistake due to lack of knowledge, BUT he would be able to lie, which involves evil or malicious intent.
- ▣ **Conclusion: Since God is omniscient (all-knowing) *and* morally perfect, he is incapable of telling a lie or making an error. God is infallible and the words He speaks is thus inerrant.**

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- ▣ Again, this is not to say that the writers were intrinsically or in themselves infallible. They were human beings.
- ▣ “It is precisely because humans are given to error that, for the Bible to be the Word of God, its human authors required assistance in their task.” – R.C. Sproul

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- ▣ Some theologians today (and some seminaries) are suggesting that God's Word is inspired but it may contain errors.
- ▣ To inspire error would require that God is either lacking in knowledge or that He is evil.
- ▣ It would possibly even call into question God's other attributes (i.e. omnipotence).
- ▣ For instance, one could argue that if the Bible contains errors, then God did not have enough power to overcome the human propensity to error.

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- ▣ Great achievement of the Reformation: The chance to privately interpret Scripture (hermeneutics)
- ▣ The Catholic Church was afraid that if people had access to Scripture, they would misinterpret it and bring up all sorts of heresies.
- ▣ The Reformers felt the risk was worth it. To deprive people from the very Word of God is the real issue.
- ▣ Everyone has a right to interpret Scripture, but no one has the right to misinterpret Scripture.