

What Do You Believe? – “The Ologies”
Study Notes #3, January 31, 2016
Theology Proper

• **REVIEW:**

This is our third lesson in the new study of “*What Do You Believe?*” We have introduced the material by considering:

- ***WHAT do we believe? Do we really know, and do we really care?***
- ***CAN we really know what we believe or not? Is there one absolute truth for every issue or matter? Is all truth absolute, universal and singular? Is there really only ONE TRUTH and FAITH for all people for all time?***
- ***HOW do determine what we believe? How much is subjective – tradition based, family based, church based, experience based, emotional, personal preference, etc.? How much is objective – based on an objective truth source?***
- ***WHY do we believe what we believe? Similar to above, what is the source or decision making behind our beliefs of faith?***
- ***WHERE do our beliefs come from? Ultimate absolute truth MUST come from God!***
- ***God has “spoken” to reveal Himself to us! God “speaks” and man is designed to “listen!”***
- ***Are our beliefs based on God’s “source?” Are they really solidly grounded in the Scriptures or not? Are the Scriptures reliable and accurate, reasonable, logical, and defensible? Why?***

So last time we looked at “**SOURCES**” of God’s revelation of truth to us. The two sources of “General Revelation” available to all people – **Creation & Conscience**. They are available to provide “general” revelation to all people in a “general” way, and provide enough revelation to know God’s greatness and goodness, and therefore hold us condemnable and accountable with no excuse! But they are insufficient to provide what is necessary to bring us to bring us to salvation and relationship with God.

That truth is only revealed to some through the **Special Revelation** of Jesus **Christ!** By the power of the truth of His word in His Scriptures and the power of its illumination in our spirits by His Spirit, we can know God’s **GRACE** and be justified, sanctified and (one day) glorified!

So we have looked at the study of the Bible in a brief overview way. I would encourage you to study that much more on your own if you have not. If interested, there is a complete set of notes for a study we did in 2004 on the Bible and how to study it. Go to the church's website, then select "MEDIA;" then select "HELPFUL RESOURCES;" then select **BIBLE STUDY – WHAT? WHY? WHO? WHEN? WHERE? HOW?**

Please be sure that you have full confidence in the Word of God, in its "inspiration" (which is really "expiration" as we noted), in its original giving through men, in its transmission, in its translation, in its canonization, in its preservation over millennia and in spite of being attacked more than any other book or set of beliefs. **We must know it and treat it as our ultimate and sole source of truth (*sola Scriptura*), and be willing to trust our lives and eternity to its truths!**

- ***EVERYTHING* else we believe must be grounded in, supported by and in agreement with the Holy Scriptures!**

With **that foundational groundwork** laid and secured – that the Word of God must be our source and standard for all truth and beliefs – we can move on to consider the different areas of study within "Theology." The first and most important is known as "***Theology Proper.***"

- **What is Theology?**

Theology likewise comes from a compound of two Greek roots. *Theos* meaning "God, and *logos* meaning "word," "idea," or "logic." So Theology is the study or word or ideas about God. Theology is a very broad term, and covers not only God Himself, but all that God has revealed to us in His word, the Holy Scriptures. That covers His revelation about us, relationships with others, and many other subjects. It has drifted over the years to be more synonymous with the word "religion." But such has not always been the case. Many schools today have Departments of Religion, but in years gone by these would have been Departments of Theology!

And Theology used to be acknowledged as the "Queen of Sciences." Obviously any study of God and His revelation to us would supersede and "trump" any other "ology" or science.

And note my use of the word "science." Theology could not be rightly called a science if knowledge of God were impossible. But God and His revelation to us about ourselves and others can be known, it can be studied!

"Religion" is usually referring to the study of man's attempts to reach God or some man-defined state by man's own efforts. Traditionally and historically, Theology has been more specifically referring to the Christian Faith and God's reaching man, revealing Himself and His word to us about both himself and ourselves.

So, “what we believe” can also be called “Theology,” as it covers all that we believe about all that God has revealed to us. What we believe is critically important to us all. In fact, nothing in life is more important!

- **Who is God?**
- **Watch video of what kindergarteners think of God**

But “**Theology Proper**” is the term used to refer to the purest and highest branch of “Theology” in total – namely **the study of God Himself!** But *before* we deal with that subject, perhaps we should first ask the obvious prerequisite question:

- **WHY should we ‘study’ ‘God?’” Why is that important? Why should we concern ourselves with “studying God?”** (*Aren’t there more important issues and concerns we should focus on first?*)

“Knowledge of the Holy” by A. W. Tozer

In 1961, A. W. Tozer wrote what was really his last book of significance before his death in 1963. Tozer was known as a common man’s pastor and theologian. He wrote many books and gained fame in life and more so after his death. But he was really an unusual and very practical “theologian.” Although he was given an honorary doctorate from both Wheaton and Houghton College, he was really self-taught and educated. Only 5 years after he was saved, he pastored his first church, and began to learn about “theology.”

What most would consider to be the most important of his over 30 books has impacted many people in dramatic ways. I am one of those. **Apart from the Bible – no other book has impacted my life like *Knowledge of the Holy*.** I am not alone in that testimony. I just heard David Platt say something similar about its impact on his life. It basically is a popular book on the attributes and character of God, in effect a book on “Theology Proper,” that is very readable and non-scholastic. A layman’s book on Theology, and the most difficult specialty of all Theology – God Himself!

My most valuable copy is this one given me by my daughter Anna lee, when she was 6! And this is how he starts it (and how I have highlighted my copy):

Chapter One - Why We Must Think Rightly About God

O, Lord God Almighty, not the God of the philosophers and the wise but the God of the prophets and apostles; and better than all, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, may I express Thee unblamed?

They that know Thee not may call upon Thee as other than Thou art, and so worship not Thee but a creature of their own fancy; therefore enlighten our minds that we may know Thee as Thou art, so that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily praise Thee.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

- Now **that is a very profound and powerful statement!** *But is it true??*
- **Is what comes into our minds when we think about God the most important thing about us?**

Before you answer – consider all of the things that are important to defining who we are – like our beliefs on the gospel, salvation, marriage, parenting, the church, work ethic, obedience, etc.! Is what we “think” about God really MORE important than all that??

- **WHY? (Discuss)**
- **What are some examples of how wrong thinking about God can lead to real problems in our lives?**

(Example of believing that God is in total control of all that is “good.” Satan is in control of all that is “bad” or “evil.” In other words, God’s sovereignty is limited to that which is not sinful. When “bad” or sinful things wreck our lives, then we wonder why God would abandon us to Satan.)

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NASB) ²³ Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴ but **let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,**" declares the LORD.

- **Watch video on What is God Like**

Tozer goes on to write in Chapter One:

The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

*For this reason **the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the***

soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.

Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" **we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.** Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, **we might be able with some precision to foretell where the Church will stand tomorrow.**

Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is its word for God. Thought and speech are God's gifts to creatures made in His image; these are intimately associated with Him and impossible apart from Him. It is highly significant that the first word was the Word: "And the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We may speak because God spoke. In Him word and idea are indivisible.

That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. **Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions** and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is. Only after an ordeal of painful self-probing are we likely to discover what we actually believe about God.

A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. **I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.**

Later he says:

A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God.

And:

The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.

And he emphasizes this profound thought:

The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its *high opinion of God.*

- ***I believe that a right set of beliefs is founded upon these essential elements:***
 1. **A faith in the Bible as the Word of God, and the sole authority for all truth.**
 2. **A *high view of God!***
 3. **An accurate view of man!**

If God is GOD, then **we cannot have too high a view of God!** In fact, one way to test our beliefs and thoughts about God is to see how “high” they are.

If we consider the infinite nature of God, can we think Him too infinite?
 If we consider the omnipotence of God, can we think Him too powerful?
 If we consider the omniscience of God, can we think Him too knowledgeable?
 ETC.....!

- ***BUT*** – what about our views on Sovereignty – do we think thoughts that limit His sovereignty?

So we should check our dilemmas about God with which view is the highest? Which one honors, magnifies, glorifies and worships God more?

The Existence of God:

One thing that most theologians would cover to begin any study of God is the *Existence of God.*

- **How do we know that God exists?**

We have really already covered the two part answer to this question, by examining the sources of the revelation of God:

A. General Revelation

1. Conscience

All people everywhere have a deep inner sense that God exists, that they are his creatures and that He is their Creator. Even unbelievers know God exist, even though they do not honor Him or give thanks to Him.

Romans 1:21 (NASB) ²¹ For **even though they knew God**, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

They actively and willfully reject the truth of God for a lie.

Romans 1:25 (NASB) ²⁵ For **they exchanged the truth of God for a lie**, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

What they know about God is “plain” or “evident” to them, because it is “within” them, in their conscience.

Romans 1:19 (NASB) ¹⁹ because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**

It is foolish to ignore the inner revelation of God available to all people.

Psalms 14:1 & 53:1 (NASB) **The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."**

2. Creation

Likewise, the existence of God is clearly revealed to all people in nature.

Romans 1:20 (NASB) ²⁰ 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.**

Psalms 19:1 (NASB) **The heavens are telling of the glory of God;** And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

And there is further evidence is all of nature and the general blessings of God from it.

Acts 14:17 (NASB) ¹⁷ and **yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."**

So God is “known” and proven to exist from that is within men and that which is external to them in creation.

B. Specific Revelation

Of course the most clear and convincing proofs of God’s existence come from His Word the Scriptures. They declare not only His existence but Who He is.

C. Traditional Philosophical “Proofs” for the Existence of God

1. Cosmological Argument

Every known thing in the universe has a cause. Therefore, the universe itself must have a cause, and it can only be God.

2. Teleological Argument

The evidence of harmony, order, and design in the universe argues that there is “design.” Therefore, there must be a Designer and Creator. The evidence of purpose points to a Creator Who created it this way.

3. Ontological Argument

This begins with the idea of a Being “greater than which nothing can be imagined.” The characteristic of existence must belong to such a being, since it is greater to exist than to not. In other words, thinking back to the highest cause and being, proves that God must exist.

4. Moral Argument

Man's sense of right and wrong, the need for justice, and a moral structure proves that God must exist. There must be a source of this, and it can only be God.

Since God exists – Who is God?

The Knowledge of God – His Incomprehensibility

It may seem odd that most theologians, (and Tozer in particular), start any study of God with His *incomprehensibility*. **Incomprehensibility** does not mean that we cannot know anything about God, but that our knowledge of Him will always be limited – we can never comprehend and know Him fully and completely. Even in heaven and our glorified state, we will still know much less of God than He really is! That is the essence of God!

John Calvin said that “**the finite cannot grasp the infinite.**” That is logical and obvious. God has to not only reveal Himself to us or we cannot know Him, He also has to do it simply and understandably, since we are beneath Him. God in His grace and mercy condescends to our level for our benefit. Much like an adult to an infant, God uses “**baby talk**” to help us understand His revelation of Himself.

One way He does so is through **anthropomorphism**. This simply means to use “human forms.” For example, when Scripture talks of the heavens as God's throne and the earth as His footstool (Isa. 66:1), or when it speaks of God owning the cattle on a thousand hills (Psa. 50:10). God is spirit, but He is often described with human features and forms to help us understand what is beyond us.

Other helpful revelation methods of God include the use of what is called *via negationis*. This is simple **the way of the negative!** God is described by what He is **not!**

Via eminentiate is the **way of eminence**. This takes human concepts or references to the ultimate degree. For example, omnipotence or omniscience extrapolations of concepts that we can understand.

Via affirmationis is the **way of affirmation**. This is simple making affirmative statements about God in a positive way, like "God is One" "God is holy," "God is sovereign."

But in spite of all the ways that God reveals Himself to us in knowable ways in His Scriptures, we are still left with the fact that He is ultimately unknowable completely – **He remains *incomprehensible!***

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NASB) ⁸ **"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,"** declares the LORD. ⁹ **"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.**

Ezekiel was like Isaiah – overwhelmed with the concepts and revelations of God. Notice after his vision was given to him.

Ezekiel 1:28 (NASB) ²⁸ As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. **Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.** And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

He recognized that his understanding and comprehension was limited to a threefold remote and distanced view and concept – an appearance of a likeness of the glory of the God! Wow!

- **How does God's *incomprehensibility* make you feel? Does it comfort or trouble you? Would you rather God be understandable and comprehensible?**

So if God is incomprehensible, and unknowable fully, what are we to do. Because we have already established that man ***must know*** God! Our very survival and success depends on our knowledge of God! And yet it seems that such is unattainable and beyond us! ***This is an impossibility! What are we to do? We must understand that before we even try, we will never fully understand or comprehend God!***

Matthew 11:27 (NASB) ²⁷ "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 (NASB) ¹⁴ **But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.** ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things,

yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶ For **WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.**

John 1:14-18 (NASB) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and **we saw His glory**, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John *testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" ¹⁶ **For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.** ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ **No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.**

- *So – How can we know God? How can we comprehend Him?*

Through Jesus Christ! He has explained Him! He is the only way we come to know God! (Truth in tension!)

We see and know God best in Jesus Christ!