

What Do You Believe? – “The Ologies”
Study Notes #6, February 28, 2016
Theology Proper – Part 4 – God’s Name and Nature

- **REVIEW:**

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

- **Why do you believe what you believe?**

So we looked at the objective and subjective means of determining our beliefs. ***What is your source, basis, or authority for your beliefs?***

That ultimately led us to the ultimate source of truth – God Himself. Only the ultimate absolute Being can provide and reveal ultimate absolute truth! And he does so objectively in His Word, the Holy Scriptures, the Bible! So we first looked at:

The Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures:

- **Bibliology – The Study of the Bible**
- ***sola Scriptura* – Scripture Alone – the sole authority and source for truth**

Then we moved into the first and logically beginning subject to study:

- **“Theology?” *Theos* – God; *logos* – logic, word, idea**

Theology Proper – The Study of God (Himself)

The first and most important is known as “***Theology Proper.***” That is the term used to refer to the purest and highest branch of “Theology” in total – namely **the study of God Himself!**

- **To Begin, “*Who*” is God?**

We looked at both the **The Existence of God** and the **The Knowledge of God – His Incomprehensibility.** As John Calvin said that “**the finite cannot grasp the infinite.**” But, through various means, we can *know God!*

So if God is incomprehensible, and unknowable fully, what are we to do? We must know God! YET - 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!***

We see and know God best in Jesus Christ!

So, we now move from looking at “Who” God is, to “What” God is.

- **“What” is God?**

*I mean this with reverence and respect, knowing He is NOT a “What” but a Who! But, we need to ponder what kind of Being He is. **What is God like? What is His essence? What is His nature?***

The TRINITY: from combination of words “tri – unity” or “three in oneness”

A. One in Essence:

- **God’s Unity and Uniqueness**

God is **ONE** in Unity & Essence
God is **HOLY** in Uniqueness

B. Three in Persons:

- **New Testament Trinity:**

God the Father
God the Son, Jesus Christ
God the Holy Spirit

- **Old Testament Trinity:**

YHWH Elohim – the Lord God
Malak YHWH – the Angel of the Lord
Ruach YHWH – the Spirit of the Lord

- **The Trinity of God –
God is Three in Persons
All Three Persons are fully God**

A. Affirmations:

1. **God is three Persons**
2. **Each Person is fully God**
3. **There is One God.**

Now we come to questioning about God’s decisions and actions –

- **How does God act?**
He acts according to His Own Divine Will!

The Will of God:

Gods' will is an attribute of purpose:
i.e. Attributes that have to do with making and carrying out decisions.

God's Will: (Definition by Wayne Grudem)

Gods' will is that attribute of God whereby He approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for the existence and activity of Himself and all creation.

- ***Gods' will is the final or most ultimate reason for everything that happens!***

This is more than evident and obvious throughout the Scriptures:

God inspired Paul to write of Himself:

Ephesians 1:11 (NASB) ¹¹ *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose **who works all things after the counsel of His will,***

- ***Yet – are there not distinctions in different aspects of God's will?***

Distinctions in Aspects of God's Will: (Distinctions of His Nature)

1. **Necessary Will of God –**
2. **Free Will of God –**

Distinctions in Aspects of God's Will: (Distinctions of His Purpose)

1. **Hidden Will of God –**

This can also be referred to as the ***Secret Will of God, the Sovereign Will of God, or the Decretive Will of God*** (His will of Divine Decree). These are the things that “must needs come to pass!” These are the things that shall most certainly be done!

2. **Revealed Will of God –**

This can also be referred to as the ***Preceptive Will of God, or His Will of Command.*** These are the things that are clearly revealed by Him to us, in His precepts, commands, or word, and may or may not be done as per the choices of men.

This “Preceptive Will of God” is often seemingly at “conflict” or paradoxically seen “**in tension**” with the “Decretive Will of God!”

In keeping with the above concept or attribute of God, namely His Will, we should also consider a logical result of the same:

The Providence of God:

“Providence” has become an “old fashioned” and almost obsolete word for American Christians! What was once a common and often used word and concept that was universally believed and embraced, has now become redefined at best, and forgotten or disputed at worst.

Providence has been traditionally used to describe and summarize God’s ongoing relationship with His creation. The word comes from the Latin *providentia*, from *providere* ‘foresee, attend to.’ Literally – “pro video!”

It relates to God’s “fore knowledge” of and provision for our future needs as His children.

Providence:

God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill His purposes.

What Providence is, includes three elements or subtopics:

1. **Preservation** – God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them.
2. **Concurrence** – God “cooperates” with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.
3. **Government** – God has a purpose in all that He does in the world and He providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish His purposes.

Romans 8:28 (NASB) ²⁸ And **we know that God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

Providence really gets meaningful when viewed in light of the whole of Romans 8, namely –

“God for us!”:

That very significant phrase “**God for us**” was the root of a Latin phrase that has been important to the church for centuries, but is now unknown. **Deus pro nobis** is the Latin for “God for us” and has been **the summary of the essence of the relationship between God and His people. This is what Providence is all about – God for us!**

(Transition – New Material)

So, we have examined:

- **Who is God?**
- **What is God like?**
- **How does God act?**

Let’s look at more of “the ologies” about God:

- **Who is God?**
(What is His Nature?)

I want to return to discussing “Who is God” from a perspective of specifics rather than generalities. And this will wrap up our look into “Theology Proper” on the study of God Himself in general. Let’s ponder what He has revealed to us about His nature, or characteristics, or attributes.

The Name and Nature of God:

To consider this, we will look at both the Names and the Nature of God. We must remember that names and nature of God is totally dependent upon what God has chosen to reveal about Himself. We can know only what He has chosen to reveal and allowed and empowered us to receive and understand through His creation, our conscience, and His Word, the Scriptures and Himself in the Person of Christ.

A. The Names of God:

The first area of self-revelation of God that we consider is especially important if we can grasp the importance that names had with the nature and character of the person in the Middle East and the Old Testament periods. Today, in America and the modern era, very little if any significance is given to the meaning of the name given to a child. The most important issues are often how does it sound with the family name and personal preference from the parents’ images and thoughts about people they knew with the same name.

The last official listing of the most popular names in America provided by the Social Security Administration, is for 2014:

Rank	Male name	Female name
1	Noah	Emma
2	Liam	Olivia
3	Mason	Sophia
4	Jacob	Isabella
5	William	Ava
6	Ethan	Mia
7	Michael	Emily
8	Alexander	Abigail
9	James	Madison
10	Daniel	Charlotte

Just FYI and laughs – their website has an interesting search feature where you can see how popular any given name has been in America over time. For example, “Aaron” was seldom used and only ranked 217th in 1955 (the year I was born). But suddenly started being used much more in the 1970’s (about when I got my “wheels”), becoming the 32nd most popular name in 1974 (when I graduated)! It stayed rather popular, peaking in 1994 when it was the 28th most popular name. It was last ranked 50th in 2014.

In the Middle East in ancient times, a name was meant to have rich meaning for that child all his life. It often commemorated some great event, or denoted the parent’s hopes or desires for that child. As we know, God saw the importance and often renamed His people to give them new names with specific meanings for their new lives in Him.

God changed Abram’s “high father” name to “Abraham,” “father of a multitude” (Genesis 17:5) and his wife’s name from “Sarai,” “my princess,” to “Sarah,” “mother of nations” (Genesis 17:15). God changed Jacob’s “supplanter” name to “Israel,” “having power with God” (Genesis 32:28). He changed Simon’s “God has heard” name to “Peter,” “rock” (John 1:42). Why did Jesus occasionally call Peter “Simon” after He had changed His name to “Peter”? Probably because Simon sometimes acted like his old self instead of the rock God called him to be. The same is true for Jacob.

So we sure need to take notice and learn from God’s self-naming of Himself! Consider what names He has given or taken unto Himself. ***If in the Bible, a person’s name is a description of his character, how much more so is true of the names God give Himself!***

This is certainly true of the most basic and commonly used Names for God, like:

- **“God”** *El* *“mighty One” “powerful One”*
 Loah *“revered One”*
 Elohim *“mighty & majestic One” “the One True God”*
 Theos *“God”*
- **“God Most High”** *El Elyon* *“most high and exalted One”*
- **“Lord, Master”** *Adonai* *“Ruler, Lord, Master”*
- **“Yahweh” (Jehovah)** *YHWH* *“The Lord God” “I AM”*
- **“God All-Sufficient”** *El Shaddai* *“The Blessing One” “God Almighty”*
- **“Lord God of Hosts”** *YHWH Sabaoth* *“Yahweh, God of Hosts”*
- **“Lord”** *Kyrios* *“Lord” “Master”*
- **“The Name”** *Sem* *“The Name” (singular in Hebrew)*

As we know, there are **many many more Names for God** in the Bible, which are more specific and very meaningful.

- **YAHWEH-JIREH:** "The Lord Will Provide" (Genesis 22:14)
- **YAHWEH-RAPHA:** "The Lord Who Heals" (Exodus 15:26)
- **YAHWEH-NISSI:** "The Lord Our Banner" (Exodus 17:15)
- **YAHWEH-M'KADDESH:** "The Lord Who Sanctifies, Makes Holy" (Leviticus 20:8; Ezekiel 37:28)
- **YAHWEH-SHALOM:** "The Lord Our Peace" (Judges 6:24)
- **YAHWEH-ELOHIM:** "LORD God" (Genesis 2:4; Psalm 59:5)
- **YAHWEH-TSIDKENU:** "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jeremiah 33:16)
- **YAHWEH-ROHI:** "The Lord Our Shepherd" (Psalm 23:1)
- **YAHWEH-SHAMMAH:** "The Lord Is There" (Ezekiel 48:35)
- **EL-OLAM:** "Everlasting God" (Psalm 90:1-3)
- **EL-GIBHOR:** "Mighty God" (Isaiah 9:6)

And there are many for God in the New Testament that we often take for granted:

- **Jesus** *“Iesous”*
- **Christ** *“Christos” “Anointed”*
- **Father** *“Pater”*
- **Holy Spirit** *“Pneumatous Hagiou”*
- **I AM** *“Ego Eimi”*

But the Nature of God is also implied and seen in the **Descriptions of God** in the Bible:

1. Descriptions from Creation:

- a. A lion *Isa. 31:4*
- b. An eagle *Deu. 32:11*
- c. A lamb *Isa. 53:7*
- d. A hen *Matt. 23:37*
- e. The sun *Psa. 84:11*

f. The morning star	Rev. 22:16
g. A light	Psa. 27:1
h. A torch	Rev. 21:23
i. A fire	Heb. 12:29
j. A fountain	Psa. 36:9
k. A rock	Deu. 32:4
l. A hiding place	Psa. 119:114
m. A tower	Pro. 18:10
n. A moth	Psa. 39:11
o. A shadow	Psa. 91:1
p. A shield	Psa. 84:11
q. A temple	Rev. 21:22

2. Descriptions from Human Experience:

a. Bridegroom	Isa. 61:10
b. Husband	Isa. 54:5
c. Father	Deu. 32:6
d. Judge	Isa. 33:22
e. King	Isa. 33:22
f. Man of War	Exo. 15:3
g. Builder and Maker	Heb. 11:10
h. Shepherd	Psa. 23:1
i. Physician	Exo. 15:26

God is also spoken of in terms of **human actions and emotions**. God is often spoken of through **human actions, emotions, and body parts**. **Anthropomorphism** – a metaphor for using human descriptions and body parts to convey something about God.

*We could say that **all of creation reveals something about God to us!***

- ***Does all of creation reveal something about God to us or not? Explain and justify!***

Why did God create the universe?

Psalm 148:3-13 (NASB)

³ Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light!

⁴ Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens!

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created.

⁶ He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away.

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, Sea monsters and all deeps;

⁸ Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;

⁹ Mountains and all hills; Fruit trees and all cedars;

¹⁰ Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and winged fowl;

¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth;

¹² Both young men and virgins; Old men and children.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven.

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

Isaiah 6:3 (NASB) ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, **The whole earth is full of His glory.**"

So we are correct to say that **everything – every created thing, both visible and invisible, was created by the word and hand of God to bring Him praise and reveal something of His name and nature!**

So we begin to get a glimpse of how God has revealed His nature to us in every place we might look – in our professions, in our homes, our family functions and roles, in our marriages, in our relationships, in all the animals, in all the plants, in all of creation – every created thing! *We can learn of Him if we care to look and receive it!*

God's Name is Who He is to us! He has exalted His Name to reveal Himself to us!

Psalm 138:2 (ESV) ² **I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.**

So here we see that God has exalted two things above all else – His Name and His Word. And where do we learn of Him and His nature – from creation and from His word, from His Name and His Nature (revealed in both creation and His word).

- ***To honor God's Name is to honor Him!***

Exodus 20:7 (NASB) ⁷ **"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.**

- ***So now does this commandment take on more meaning than just using God is vulgar speech or expressions?***

We dishonor God's reputation or name by both words that speak of Him in foolish or misleading way, and by actions that do not reflect His true character or nature.

- ***How can we honor God's Name?***

We speak and act in ways that honor His true name and nature, and reflect His character and purposes in us. We are "worthy" of His "name."

Illustration: A story from the life of Alexander the Great, who was of course was one of the greatest generals who ever lived, conquering almost the entire known world with his vast army. It is said that one night during a campaign, the great general couldn't sleep

so he left his tent to walk around the camp. As he did Alexander came across a soldier asleep on guard duty—a very serious offense. The penalty for falling asleep on guard duty was instant death. In fact, in those days, sometimes the commanding officer would pour kerosene on the sleeping soldier and light it. Well, this particular soldier began to wake up as Alexander the Great approached him and recognizing who was standing in front of him, the young man feared for his life. “Do you know what the penalty is for falling asleep on guard duty?” Alexander asked. “Yes sir,” the soldier responded in a quivering voice. “Soldier, what is your name?” demanded Alexander. “It’s Alexander, sir.” Alexander the Great repeated his question, “What did you say was your name?” “My name is Alexander sir,” the soldier repeated. A third time and more loudly, Alexander the Great asked, “WHAT is your name?!” And a third time the soldier meekly said, “My name is Alexander sir.” Alexander the Great then looked the young soldier straight in the eye and said, **“Soldier, either change your name or change your conduct.”**

We must remember that although all that Scripture tells us about God is true, it is not exhaustive. Scripture does not tell us everything about God’s name or nature. Thus we will never know God’s *full or complete* “Name” in the sense that we will never understand God’s character exhaustively.

“God has many names, yet God has no name.”

The Jews knew something of this reverence and the incomprehensibility of God and His name in that they would not even speak His name in the Old Testament. They say “God” (Elohim) as His “title” and “Jehovah” (YHWH) as His “name.” We pronounce both Yahweh and Jehovah as we think, but we actually do not know how it should be said because of that reference.

- **“You have exalted above all things your name and your word.”**

B. The Nature of God:

This brings us to the study of the **Nature** or Characteristics or **Attributes of God**. By “nature” we mean the complex of attributes or characteristics that belongs to or is inherently in God that makes Him to be Who He is and distinct from everything else. And the “nature” of God is inseparably linked to the “attributes” of God, and vice versa.

As Robert Reymond wrote, **“sometimes God’s attributes are represented as standing in relation to God in the same sense that pins are related to a pin cushion.** This is erroneous thinking in the extreme. While a pin, which has a nature all its own, may be added or removed from a pin cushion, which also has a nature all its own, without changing in any way the essential nature of the pin cushion, **the attributes of God are essential to the nature of God.”**

“God’s essence is identified with all of His attributes.”

“God’s nature is His essence, and His essence is His nature.”

- We cannot separate an attribute from God, as God is the complete sum of all His attributes.
- Since God is the sum of His attributes, every attribute is essential to His nature

SOME of His Attributes are:

- Aseity (Independence, Self-Existence), Eternity, Immutability, Unity, Omnipresence
- Glory, Holiness, Beauty, Perfection, Blessedness
- Invisibility, Spirituality
- Freedom, Omnipotence (Sovereignty), Will
- Goodness, Jealousy, Love, Mercy, Peace, Righteousness (Justice), Wrath
- Omniscience (Knowledge), Truthfulness, Wisdom

There are at least 4 different places and ways that God’s essence is defined in a propositional statement, like **“God is ...”** Consider these to illustrate the point:

1. **“God is spirit”** (John 4:24)
2. **“God is light”** (1John 1:15)
3. **“God is love”** (1John 4:8,16)
4. **“God is a consuming fire”** (Heb. 12:29)

- Could not similar statements be made about every attribute of God?
e.g. *“God is mercy”*; *“God is righteousness”*; *“God is wrath”*; etc....

So, each attribute is indicative of the essence and nature of God. But, they are not true unless taken in the whole with all other attributes.

- **Is God any less “wrath” than He is “love?” Is He any less “jealousy” than He is “mercy?”**

To quote Morton H. Smith:

“Every attribute is identical with His Being. He is what He has. Whatever God is He is completely and simultaneously.”

Reymond goes on to say:

“God’s attributes are real, distinguishable characteristics of His Being.” And we can further state that His Being and His essence is the sum of His attributes and cannot be defined by any one of them.

These attributes are not specifically defined and delineated in the Scriptures, but they are manifested throughout the Bible in a systematic fashion.

Dogmatics: (Tangential material if time permits to explain relevance and authority of topic discussed.)

“Dogmatics” is an old word that used to be somewhat synonymous with “Systematic Theology”. It dealt with the “Dogmata”, or the accepted doctrines of the Church. It came from the Greek root *dokein*, meaning “it seems to me” or “I am of the opinion” or “I have come to the conclusion – I am certain – it is my conviction!”

Although not regarded as infallible (like Scripture), the Reformers regarded Dogmas as being Divine truths, clearly revealed in Holy Scripture. They were identified as being universal, foundational, and essential truths of the Christian faith – things on which our faith stands or falls!

The Formal Characteristics of Dogmas:

1. Their subject matter is derived from Scripture. (They must be true to the Bible.)
2. Dogmas are the fruit of dogmatic reflection. (They are not in their finished form in the Scriptures, but are found by reflecting on the truths revealed in them.)
3. Dogmas are officially defined by some competent ecclesiastical body. (They must have been formulated and accepted by some church body, council or group of theologians that are committed to the authority of the Bible.)

Therefore, being “dogmatic” is not a “bad” thing! It may have developed a bad reputation, but that is surely from the people who may have embraced (some of) the teaching without embracing the Teacher!

- **Watch video of Paul Washer about the Character of God**
Discuss!

You may recognize the following “Bible Pledge” from a famous TV personality:

This is my Bible:

I am what it says I am;

I have what it says I have;

I can do what it says I can do.

Today, I will be taught the Word of God.

I'll boldly confess.

My mind is alert;

my heart is receptive;

I will never be the same.

I am about to receive the incorruptible, indestructible, ever-living Seed of the Word of God.

I'll never be the same

*never, never, never!
I'll never be the same,
in Jesus' Name.*

Well, especially for this study of God's attributes, I think we might be better to rewrite part of this "pledge" and make it more **God-focused** and less man-centered:

***This is God's Bible
He is Who He says He is
He has what He says He has
He does what He says He does***

***God reveals, defines and speaks for Himself!
We must get our thinking about God in line with His revelation!***

We are fooling ourselves to re-create God into someone we want Him to be! He is Who He says He is, no matter how strongly we feel about "our God!" How often do we hear or even say, "well, *my God* would not do that" or "*my God* is not like that." A false God cannot be properly worshipped; a false God cannot be properly obeyed; and a false God cannot be properly loved and communed with. And a false God leads to false thinking about man, which leads to many sins and devastating philosophies.

That leads us into the fact that these attributes are often categorized, just to help think of them systematically. These categories are not found in the Scriptures either, but do make rational and logical sense of these truths that are Scriptural.

God's Attributes are most commonly divided into two broad categories:

1. **Incommunicable Attributes**
2. **Communicable Attributes**

Incommunicable attributes are those that God does not "share" or "communicate" to anyone or anything else.

Communicable attributes are those that God "shares" or "communicates" with us to some degree although not fully.

- **Hand out "The Attributes of God" from Challies Visual Theology**
- **Discuss**

Further, the communicable attributes are often further divided into:

- a. **Summary Attributes**
- b. **Attributes of God's Being**
- c. **Attributes of Purpose**
- d. **Moral Attributes**
- e. **Mental Attributes**

The Attributes of God: (Just *some* from Challies & Grudem – not comprehensive!)

A. Incommunicable Attributes

**Aseity
(Independence, Self-Existence)
Eternity
Immutability
Unity
Omnipresence**

B. Communicable Attributes

1. Summary Attributes

**Glory
Holiness
Beauty
Perfection
Blessedness**

2. Attributes of God's Being

**Invisibility
Spirituality**

3. Attributes of Purpose

**Freedom
Omnipotence (Sovereignty)
Will**

4. Moral Attributes

**Goodness
Jealousy
Love
Mercy
Peace
Righteousness (Justice)
Wrath**

5. Mental Attributes

**Omniscience (Knowledge)
Truthfulness
Wisdom**

So today and in the days to come, we need to focus on what God says about Himself in His word, as His self-revelation of Himself.

- **SUMMARY:**

God's Name is His reputation, His character, ... Who He is!

We should live to honor His name! We should “change our name or change our conduct!”

God's Nature is the sum of His attributes, and His attributes are His nature. They are all inseparably linked and interconnected.

We should focus on Who He is, praise Him for it, and be changed as we behold Him!
We should not isolate His attributes from the total sum of them – His nature!