

# Christian Theology 1

## Lesson 2 – The Study of God (Part 1)

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### I. Recap

1. What is theology?
2. How would you respond to someone who said “I don’t study theology because doctrine divides?”
3. Why must a study of theology begin with bibliology – the study of the Bible?
4. How would you respond to someone who says that the Bible doesn’t have any authority because it’s an unreliable collection of writings selectively chosen by church councils?

### II. Introduction

A.W. Tozer famously wrote “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
2. What are some popular perceptions of God?
3. What is the danger of having the wrong perception about God?

“I believe that if there is one area of our theology that is most lacking in the church today, it is our understanding of who He really is. Our most rudimentary problem is that we do not fully comprehend who He is. Our thoughts about Him have become very unclear, fuzzy, and oblique. The result of this distorted view of deity is that it leaves everything else out of focus as well. Whenever we lose a right view of God, everything else gets out of perspective.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (HarperCollins Publishers: New York, NY, 1961), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Lawson, *Made in Our Image* (Multnomah Publishers: Sisters, Oregon, 2000), 15.

### III. The Study of God (Theology Proper)

#### a. The Existence of God

- i. Genesis 1:1 ***“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”***

“This volume does not seek to prove the existence of God from human reasoning but rather presupposes that the God of the Bible exists...The only reliable proof of the existence of the true God consists of statements from and about him in his inspired Word. God must not be excluded from testifying about himself...The Bible begins with the foundational presupposition that God existed ‘in the beginning’ (Gen. 1:1). So every statement from the Bible about God’s nature and actions is proof from him of his existence.”<sup>3</sup>

4. How would you respond to an unbeliever who says they don’t believe in God because you can’t prove that he exists with science?

#### b. The Knowability of God

- i. Knowable

1. Romans 1:20-21 <sup>20</sup> ***For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”***
2. Hebrews 1:1-2 <sup>1</sup> ***Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”***

- ii. Incomprehensible

1. Psalm 145:3 ***“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.”***

5. Why do you think God decided to reveal himself to us?

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL, 2017), 144.

**c. The Names of God**

- i. "A person's name symbolizes all that one is and does...To God and to the people of Israel, God's names were especially important because they revealed aspects of who he was in himself, in his actions within himself, and in relation to his creation."<sup>4</sup>
  1. Yahweh (YHWH/LORD)
    - a. Exodus 3:14 **"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.'"**
    - b. "So the name indicates that God 'is' or 'wills to be.' The name implies that he had no beginning, will have no ending, and is ever present. The name also implies that his being is derived from his own self-determination to be and to be what he is, so he is eternally who and what he is."<sup>5</sup>
  2. [YHWH \_\_\_\_\_] - LORD of Hosts, LORD who will Provide, LORD Your Healer, LORD Is My Banner, LORD who Sanctifies, LORD Is Peace, LORD is My Shepherd, LORD is Our Righteousness, LORD is There.
  3. El, Eloah, and Elohim (God) – indicates God as supreme in power, strength and might.<sup>6</sup> God-Almighty, God Most High, the Everlasting God, the Living God.
  4. Adon/Adonai (Lord) – superiority in position and sovereignty.
  5. Tsur (Rock) – strength and reliability
  6. Father – the prime agent or actor in all his relationships and actions.

**d. The Spirituality of God (Personhood)**

- i. God is spirit
  1. John 4:24 **"God is spirit"**

"God's being cannot be rightly thought of in terms of space, however we may understand his existence as 'spirit'...God does not have a physical body, nor is he made of any kind of matter like much of the rest of creation...God's being is not even exactly like our own spirits, for these are created things...God's spirituality means that God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence."<sup>7</sup>
- ii. God is self-conscious
  1. Exodus 3:14 **"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'"**

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<sup>4</sup> MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 154.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 187-188).

- iii. God is alive and active
    - 1. Deuteronomy 5:26 ***“For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire as we have, and has still lived?”***
  - iv. God is intelligent
    - 1. 1 Samuel 2:3 ***“the LORD is a God of knowledge”***
  - v. God is emotional
    - 1. Psalm 103:13 ***“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him.”***
  - vi. God is free (i.e. self-determined)
    - 1. Job 23:13 ***“But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does.”***
  - vii. God is purposeful
    - 1. Isaiah 14:26-27 ***“<sup>26</sup> This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. <sup>27</sup> For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?”***
2. The Character of His Decrees
    - a. Freely made
      - i. Psalm 135:6 ***“Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.”***
    - b. Unchangeably made
      - i. Psalm 33:11 ***“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.”***
        1. Preservation (Heb. 1:3)
        2. Providence (Rom. 8:28)
  3. The Scope of His Decrees
    - a. Macro (Rev. 13:8)
    - b. Micro (Prov. 16:33; cf. Esther)
  4. The Results of His Decrees
    - a. Creation and preservation (Ps. 119:90b-91)
    - b. All history (Dan. 2:20-21; Acts 17:26)
    - c. Circumstances of Life (James 4:13-15)
    - d. Duration of life (Job 14:5)
    - e. Manner of death (John 21:18-19)
    - f. Good acts of men (Is. 44:28-45:7; Eph. 2:10)
    - g. Evil acts of men (Gen. 45:4-8; 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)
    - h. Salvation of sinners (2 Thess. 2:13-14)
    - i. Perdition of ungodly men (1 Pet. 2:8)
  5. The Purpose of God’s Decrees
    - a. Romans 11:36 ***“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”***

Balancing Biblical Certainties:

- 1) The sovereignty of God
- 2) The sinfulness of man
- 3) The responsibility of man

b. The Tension of God's Decrees

- i. Sovereignty & Evil
- ii. Human "freedom"
- iii. Efficacious and Permissive Decrees
- iv. Results of Denying God's Decrees
  1. Same tensions remain about evil
  2. Finite God
  3. Self-Limited God

6. How does God's personhood impact our worship of Him?
7. How does God's sovereignty and decrees give us hope in the midst of suffering?
8. How does the decree of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection help us maintain our balance between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility?
9. What problems would we face if God was not sovereign?

**IV. Commonly Asked Questions:**

1. If God is sovereign over all, does that make him the author of sin?
2. If God has determined everything will ever occur, both good and bad, do humans have free will?
3. If God has determined everything that will ever occur why should I pray or evangelize?

**V. For Class Credit (choose one)**

- Choose one of the names of God or an aspect of His personhood, coupled with a supporting Bible verse, and take an opportunity this week to explain to someone why this is meaningful and encouraging (e.g. conversation with family member, life group, text message, email, card of encouragement or sympathy, social media post...etc.).
- Reflect on your life and list out 10 specific ways you have seen God's sovereignty manifest itself and it's impact on you.