

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture.

Topic 2 – The Doctrine of God

Lesson 15 – The Existence of God – Natural Proofs

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God Is

- The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. It tells us, “IN THE BEGINNING GOD...”
- The study of God is referred to as “Theology Proper.”
- In examining the Doctrine of God we will study His:
 - 1) Existence
 - 2) Attributes
 - 3) Tri-Unity
 - 4) Works – decreeing, creating, ruling

Sources: MacArthur and Berkhof

The Knowable God

- The Scriptures make God knowable to us.
- We may know Him truly, but cannot know Him exhaustively.
- “God is truly knowable but not exhaustively comprehensible.” – MacArthur, pg. 145
- John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
- God is eternal and holy, transcending time and space, infinitely omniscient, and absolutely morally pure. We are none of these things!
- The depths of God are known only by God
- 1 Cor. 2:11 Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.
- Psalm 145:3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.

The Knowable God

- “It is not only true that we can never fully understand God; it is also true that we can never fully understand any single thing about God. His greatness (Psa. 145:3), His understanding (Psa. 147:5), His knowledge (Psa. 139:6), His riches, wisdom, judgments, and ways (Rom. 11:33) are all beyond our ability to understand fully. Thus we may know something about God’s love, power, wisdom, and so forth. But we can never know His love completely or exhaustively. We can never know His power exhaustively. We can never know His wisdom exhaustively. In order to know any single thing about God Exhaustively we would need to know it as He Himself knows it. That is, we would have to know it in its relationship to everything else about God and in its relationship to everything else about creation throughout eternity. We can only exclaim with David, ‘Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.’” (Psa. 139:6) – Grudem pg. 150

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- Scripture alone is the primary basis for infallible proof of the existence of God.
- Natural proofs, while useful, are always secondary to the Scripture.
- God has revealed Himself by means other than Scripture – nonverbally through nature, conscience, and history. This is general revelation (natural revelation).
- Left to his own imagination and thinking, man will distort natural revelation, just as he does the special revelation of Scripture without the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- The Ontological Argument – Man has the idea or notion of an absolute perfect being. This then is the greatest thought of man, or the greatest thing of which a man can think. But if there exists no such perfect being, then this is not the greatest thing of which we can think, for existence is an attribute of absolute perfection. Therefore since we can think of it, an absolutely perfect being must exist.
- However, the fact that we have an idea of God does not prove God exists. The abstract cannot prove the real. Having an idea of God is not the same as having an experience with God.

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- The Cosmological Argument – There cannot be an infinite sequence of causes. There must be a first cause, or an unmoved mover. That first cause is God.
- However, it is very easy to redefine the first cause as something other than God. For example, the Big Bang. It can also be reasoned, as Kant did, that even if God were the first cause (of the universe), He as a being that exists, must have had a cause.

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- The Teleological Argument – Argument from Design. The complex order, design, purpose, and intelligence in the universe is the result of the work of an intelligent, purposeful designer, who is God.
- Kant also argued that this only proves that there is a great architect behind the universes, and not that the architect is God.

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- The Moral Argument – the ethical phenomena in man (conscience, reward, punishment, values, and the fear of death) imply a moral being who created and maintains the moral order in the world.
- While this is one of the strongest arguments that can be offered, it still does not necessarily follow to the conclusion that the God of the Bible exists, especially with the post-modern redefinition of morality as a social construct necessary for the “greater good” of a culture. What one culture considers moral, others deny.

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- The Historical Argument (Ethnological) – The so-called “universality of religion”, the notion that among all peoples and tribes of the earth there is a sense of the divine, which reveals itself in external cultus (religious behavior). Therefore it must be held within the very constitution of man that there is a Higher Being that has so constituted us.
- However, most religious expression in the world is focused not on a personal Being, but on a powerful deity or deities, and that this could be something that was taught and handed down by an early progenitor of the human race. It is also held that the “religious cultus” is more evident the more primitive a culture and disappears in the measure to which they become civilized.

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- The Progress of Humanity Argument – the apparent progress in human civilization throughout history indicates that man is on the way to fulfilling the plan of a wise and omnipotent world ruler, who is God.
- We must ask, it is really progress? We see great levels of complexity, knowledge, and skill in so-called primitive societies, some of them having accomplished feats that we cannot explain or duplicate.

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- Responses to the Natural Proofs:
- None of these arguments necessitate only One God, nor that One God being the God of the Bible.
- None of these arguments necessarily point to something that is perfectly good or unchangeable, since the world is marked by evil and change.
- None of these arguments necessarily point to that which is perfect, since perfection might transcend what man can think, since human ideas exist only in man and since not all people have a common concept of perfection.
- None of these arguments prove that an infinite sequence of causes is inherently impossible, and none of these arguments necessitate that any original cause or designer is a god, unless one first presupposes a definition of "god."
- - MacArthur, pg. 150

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- In considering the usefulness of these arguments:
 - Are any of these arguments true without imported presupposition?
 - What presuppositions make each argument work?
 - Is there reasoning so cogent that one should expect any of these arguments to persuade an otherwise rational person?
 - Does their reasoning necessitate that an otherwise rational person who rejects them is acting irrationally?
 - Can these arguments be useful in evangelical ministry? If so, how?
- MacArthur, pg. 150

Natural Proofs for the Existence of God

- “The truth is that when it comes to these arguments, believers do not need them. Their conviction respecting the existence of God does not depend on them, but on a believing acceptance of God’s self-revelation in Scripture. If many in our day are willing to stake their faith in the existence of God on such rational arguments, it is to a great extent due to the fact that they refuse to accept the testimony of the Word of God. Moreover in using these arguments in an attempt to convince unbelievers, it will be well to bear in mind that none of them can be said to carry absolute conviction. They have some value for believers themselves, but should be called *testimonia* rather than arguments.” – Berkhof, pg. 14-15