

Who is God?

The nature, attributes, and existence of the Triune God

Introduction

- ✦ Why seek to know and understand God?
- ✦ Jeremiah 9:23-24 –
 - ✦ *Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, **that he understands and knows me**, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”*
- ✦ Wisdom, might, riches mean nothing in comparison to knowing and understanding God.
- ✦ For an unknown God cannot be loved, trusted, served, or worshiped.

Why seek to know and understand God?

- ✦ The 1689 London Baptist Confession, Chapter 2.3 states:
 - ✦ The knowledge of God in the Trinity *“is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.”*
- ✦ The most basic reality of the Christian faith is the doctrine of God; the God who is One in three.
- ✦ If we are to enjoy communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him (trust, comfort, peace, etc.), then we must seek to know Him as best we are able.

All men know God exists

- ✦ The awareness of God is woven into our nature as creatures. John Calvin called this the “*Sensus divinitatis*” – the ‘sense of divinity’.
 - ✦ “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity.”
 - ✦ That is, God has placed within all men a sense of divinity, which provides man with a “certain understanding of his divine majesty.”
- ✦ **Romans 1:19-20** - *For what can be known about God is plain to [all men], because God has shown it to them. 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.*

Sin and ‘the sense of the divine’

- ✦ Although all men are aware of God, because of sin, this knowledge of God has been turned into the rope by which we hang ourselves.
- ✦ Romans 1:21-23 –
 - ✦ *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. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

Man's attempt to know God

- ✦ Attempts by fallen men to comprehend God normally turn to:
 - ✦ **Mysticism** of experience and euphoria.
 - ✦ **Morality** and how to live a certain way and obtain a certain level of respect or right standing with the deity; to gain leverage over our creator to where He owes us something.
 - ✦ **Philosophy** of speculation and human reasoning.
- ✦ These approaches inevitably lead to Polytheism, Pantheism, Panentheism, Deism, or Atheism.

Man's attempt to know God

- ✦ **Polytheism:** Belief in many gods.
 - ✦ Sun, moon, stars, 'mother nature', etc.
- ✦ **Pantheism:** Everything is divine.
 - ✦ Nature, inanimate objects, etc., are all gods.
- ✦ **Panentheism:** All is within divinity; the divine and worldly principles are mutually dependent.
 - ✦ God needs the world in some way.
- ✦ **Deism:** God created the world but doesn't intervene.
 - ✦ God has created and wound the clock; now He is absent.
- ✦ **Atheism:** God does not exist. A conscious turning away from God.

Man's attempt to know God

- ✦ But because of the fall and the effects of sin, we can't 'feel' our way to God, ascend to knowledge of heaven by our own wisdom, or know him in a saving way through creation/natural revelation.
- ✦ 1689 LBC, 1.1 - *Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; **yet are they not sufficient** to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation.*
- ✦ SIN has rendered man incapable of knowing and understanding God when left to himself.

Christianity is unique

- ✦ Thus, in seeking the knowledge of God, Christianity does not begin with:
 - ✦ What we want, what our plans, goals, dreams are, etc.
 - ✦ A search for truths that we personally find useful in life (pragmatism).
 - ✦ The goal of strengthening ourselves in order to accomplish our goals, our dreams, our betterment.
- ✦ These approaches inevitably lead to idol making; making God in our own image.

God has come to us

- ✦ Therefore, in approaching the knowledge of God, Christianity doesn't start with man; it starts with God.
- ✦ Instead of seeking God in the highest of spiritual heights, or by taking an inventory of our personal needs and preferences and looking for a God to meet such, we meet a God who has graciously descended to us in the Person of Jesus Christ.
- ✦ We start with God's revelation to us, and **then we align ourselves to Him**.
- ✦ **Thus, the basic starting point** for all sound theology is that we cannot know God reliably from our own wisdom or experience, or from the created order, but only from God's revelation in Christ, which comes to us in scripture.

Begin with the gospel

- ✦ If we are to understand God, we must not try and start by proving the deity and then working towards Jesus Christ.
- ✦ We must **begin** with the gospel.
- ✦ There are great arguments for the existence of a deity, but without the gospel they are either meaningless or a horrible threat because of our sinfulness.
- ✦ Not only does the gospel reveal who God is, but the work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit make it possible for us to believe in Him given the world around us; and not just to believe, but to **trust** the God who's made Himself known in Christ.
- ✦ Thus, we believe in God and who He is because we believe the gospel.

Creature – Creator Distinction

- ✦ But there is another important reality that we must consider when approaching the knowledge of God.
- ✦ Not only does our sinfulness hinder us, but even when we approach God on His terms, there is a great distance that exists between God and man.
- ✦ In other words: we must remember that there is a distinction between God and man.
 - ✦ We are not God.
 - ✦ God is not like us.

Distance between God and man

- ✦ We will never know anything **exactly** how God knows it, and some things we will never know at all:
- ✦ Isaiah 55:8-9 -
 - ✦ *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*
- ✦ Deuteronomy 29:29 –
 - ✦ *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

Creator–Creature Distinction

- ✦ As creatures, God is very different.
 - ✦ A **quantitative** difference between us and God
 - ✦ But also a **qualitative** difference between us and God

- ✦ God isn't just bigger than us; He doesn't just know more than we know.
 - ✦ God is qualitatively different than us
 - ✦ His knowing is qualitatively different than our knowing

Creator–Creature Distinction

✦ God is **incomprehensible**:

- ✦ We cannot ‘figure out’ God
- ✦ There will always be aspects of God that are mysterious and unknown to us creatures.

✦ God is **transcendent**:

- ✦ He is qualitatively distinct from the world, and completely independent from the world.

✦ Yet, God is **immanent** as well:

- ✦ He is present in the world, entering into covenant with his creatures, sustaining life. Of course, saving humanity in assuming their nature, etc.

✦ God has **condescended**:

- ✦ We know things as God has revealed them to us, because he has accommodated himself to our feeble capacity to understand.

Paul on Mars Hill: Acts 17

- ✦ Read Acts 17:16-34
- ✦ *V16: “he saw that the city was full of idols.”* – man’s attempt to find God.
- ✦ *V24-25: “He does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”* – God is transcendent, outside of creation, independent.
- ✦ *V26-28: “he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place... Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”*” – God is immanent, involved with creation, present.

Paul on Mars Hill: Acts 17

- ✦ *V30-31: The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*
- ✦ The reality of God is bad news outside of Christ; Paul recognizes this and assures his listeners that God ‘has overlooked’ the times of ignorance because of the work of Christ.
- ✦ Paul concludes with the resurrection.
 - ✦ This is where he goes to explain God: the gospel.
 - ✦ Not just philosophy and speculation and wisdom: but a real, historical event in human history.
 - ✦ This is how God has descended to us and revealed himself finally and fully through.