

Introduction:

- Ligonier theology survey.
- I want to give a few more statistics so that we realize the need for church members to study systematic theology:
 - Statement 3: God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. 51% agree vs 42% disagree
 - Statement 20: Worshiping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church. 58% agree vs 30 disagree
 - Statement 14: The Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true. 53% of 18-34 year olds agree
- #11 Everyone sins a little but most people are good by nature. 52% of evangelicals agree. 3% not sure. That is a problem with anthropology and hamartiology
- #6: Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God. 78 % agree. This is a problem with Christology.
- #12 Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation. 23% agree. Nearly 70% disagree. That is a problem with theology proper; soteriology; anthropology.
- #19 There will be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all people who have lived. Only 64% agree.
- #29 The Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior does not apply today. 44% agree.
- #27 Abortion is a sin. Only 52% agree.
- #28 Gender identity is a matter of choice. 46% age 18-34 agree.
- #30 Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth. 32% agree.
- #34 Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation. Only 62% agree.

- What does this tell us? And what does this tell us about the need to study systematic theology?
- Reading
 - This week's reading is, chpt 3 pp 143-165
- So, we will begin studying what is called Theology Proper; which means the doctrine of God.
- We must not study theology proper w/o bibliology. Why?
 - We must be sure that we are getting our facts about God from a factual source.
 - In bibliology, we learned that the Bible is special revelation inspired (verbal plenary) by God. Therefore, the Bible is inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient for all matters about which it speaks.
 - Why does that matter? We can be sure that whatever the Bible says about God is inerrant; factual; w/o error.
 - We do not consult the bhagavad gita, the Qur'an, or the book of Mormon for our doctrine of God b/c they cannot demonstrate that they are divine revelation, therefore, they cannot demonstrate inerrancy.
- So, we proceed joyfully and confidently in our study of systematic theology, knowing that insofar as our theology is from Scripture, it is fact.
- The late A.W. Tozer said:

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

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" (*Knowledge of the Holy*).

- So I ask you, what comes into your mind when you think about God?
- Do you think about God?
- If you're like me, you don't think about God enough.
- For that reason, the elders trust that this class on the doctrine of God will hopefully be an encouragement.

1. The Existence of God

a. The Knowability of God

- We begin by asking this critical question: is God knowable? Can the creature know something of the Creator? If so, what can we know and how do we know that we can know?
- How would you answer those questions, from a bibliological perspective then?
 - Yes, we can know him b/c he has chosen to make himself known. How?
 - Special revelation and general revelation.
- Salvation is not only to get out of hell, though that is an infinite blessing. Salvation is also so important b/c it is the beginning of knowing God savingly.

- iv. Jer 9:23 – Do not boast of your riches, your strength, or your wisdom, but boast that you understand and know me; and that you know him savingly; relationally; personally.
- v. So it is only appropriate for me to ask: do you know God? Have you repented and been regenerated to know God?

b. The Bible presupposes the existence of God

- i. How does the Bible begin? The Bible begins, “In the beginning, God...”
- ii. Why doesn’t the Bible begin with a philosophical argument, seeking to convince readers that God exists?
 - 1. The Bible is not from man, but God. That is central to properly understanding it.
 - 2. It gives God’s point of view, not man’s point of view; of life, history, the universe, mankind, God, and the end of the age. Simply put, the Bible is God’s point of view of things.
 - 3. So, when we are studying God, whose point of view is most reliable to correctly understand God? God’s.
 - 4. Therefore, we study Scripture to best understand God.
 - 5. So, why doesn’t the Bible begin w/ a philosophical defense of God’s existence? B/c we are studying God’s point of view. And in God’s eyes, it is unnecessary to argue for his own existence.
 - 6. That God is, IS the most absolute thing.
 - 7. That God is, IS the most demonstrable thing.
 - 8. That God is, IS the most fundamental thing.
 - 9. That God is, IS the most obvious thing.

10. For those reasons, it would be inappropriate to the dignity of mankind to begin the Bible with a defense of God's existence.
11. And for those reasons, the Bible does not begin by saying, "In the beginning, there was God and let me convince you," but, "In the beginning, God created..."
 - iii. It must begin assuming God exists b/c it is the inerrant word of God. And to testify otherwise, namely, that God did not exist, would be to lie.
 - iv. Proofs of God's existence, then, begin with the Bible.

c. Biblical declarations of God's existence

- i. Redemptive Requirement: the fact that God requires the redeemed to believe in him means he exists (Ps. 14:1, Heb. 11:6).
- ii. God's Eternality: the fact that God exists eternally proves that he exists as God (Ps. 90:2, Isa. 44:6).
- iii. God's Self-Existence: the fact that God depends on nothing for his existence demonstrates that he is the only true independent being, demonstrates that he is God (Ex. 3:14, Acts 17:24-25, Rom. 11:36).

d. Natural proofs of God's existence

- Arguments on the natural level are powerful, but not saving (e.g. from Rom 1:18-23; design = Designer; ability to recognize design; conscience; beauty, function, & order in creation require an intelligent, uncreated Being).
- These arguments are insufficient to render a sinner in right standing with holy God. They cannot save.
- They can be used apologetically to lead someone to the God of the Bible.
- However, without Scripture, we cannot be saved. Only the gift of salvation through the sovereign grace of God imparted by the Holy

Spirit through Scripture supplies saving faith and true knowledge of God (Rom. 10:17, Jas 1:18, 1 Pet. 1:23-25).

- Louis Berkhof: “[Christians’] conviction respecting the existence of God does not depend on them [natural proofs], but on a believing acceptance of God’s self-revelation in Scripture.”
 - i. The ontological argument
 1. Formulated by Anselm of Canterbury (11th cent.).
 2. It states that God’s existence is proved by man’s thought that God exists as the perfect being.
 3. If man can think that God exists as a perfect being, then this God must exist, since for him to not exist would make him not a perfect being.
 - ii. The cosmological argument
 1. Thomas Aquinas (13th cent.).
 2. There cannot be an infinite series of causes, therefore, there must be one original/supreme cause, namely, God.
 3. There must be one supreme Cause behind all other causes. This first cause is God.
 - iii. The teleological argument
 1. Thomas Aquinas. However, Plato (5th cent. B.C.), Aristotle (4th cent. B.C.), and Immanuel Kant (18th cent.) also held to the teleological argument.
 2. The intelligent design that is evident in the universe proves the presence of an intelligent designer, God.
 3. Creationists often argue from the teleological standpoint.
 - iv. The moral argument
 1. Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant.

2. Man's inherent sense of morality, justice, and ethics proves the existence of a prior, supreme being from whom morality, justice, and ethics originates.
- So, once again, natural proofs are helpful, but they arise from general revelation (creation & conscience).
- God's existence must be ultimately established by Scripture, and not natural proofs appealing to reason outside of Scripture.
- However, they are helpful to strengthen faith and lead the unregenerate to Scripture.
- But, one way in which God reveals himself infallibly is through his various names in Scripture:

2. The Names of God

- a. Yahweh
 - i. The most common name God uses of himself, appearing more than 6800 times in the OT.
 - ii. Has the idea of "he eternally is," which highlights God's self-existence and eternality. He is eternally who he is and what he is.
- b. Yahweh-tsabaoth (Yahweh of hosts).
 - i. Speaks of God's sovereign direction and leadership of created beings (angelic and human) to accomplish his purposes (Ex. 7:4, Ps. 24:10).
- c. Yahweh-yireh (Yahweh provides).
 - i. Speaks of God's providence in support of his sovereign purposes (Gen. 22:14).
- d. Yahweh-rophe (Yahweh your healer).
 - i. Speaks of God's deliverance and rescue of his people from physical/earthly trials (Exod. 15:26).

- e. Yahweh-nissi (Yahweh is my banner).
 - i. Speaks to God's victorious leadership of his people over their enemies (Ex. 17:15).
- f. Yahweh-meqqaddishkem (Yahweh who sanctifies).
 - i. Speaks of God who will sanctify and set apart his elect from sin and surrounding nations in order to serve and worship him (Ex. 33:13).
- You will notice that many of these names were given around the Exodus, or the early days of redemptive history. Why might that be?
 - g. Yahweh-shalom (Yahweh is peace).
 - i. Speaks to God's work of bringing peace to his people and protection from enemies (Judg. 6:24).
 - h. Yahweh-roiy (Yahweh is my shepherd).
 - i. Speaks to God's constant presence and work of shepherding-care over his elect (Ps. 23:1).
 - i. Yahweh-tsidkenu (Yahweh is our righteousness).
 - i. Speaks to God's righteous reign, especially as it concerns Christ, the future Davidic king in the millennial kingdom (Jer. 23:6).
 - j. Yahweh-shammah (Yahweh is there).
 - i. Speaks to God's nearness and presence with his people through thick and thin (Ezek. 48:35).
 - k. The "El" names
 - As Hebrew names for the true God, "El", and similar prefixes speak of God as a God of supreme power, strength, and might. These are some of the "el" compound names
 - i. El Shaddai (God Almighty, God Who Provides/Protect)

1. Speaks to God's power to protect and provide (Gen. 17:1, 91:1).
 - ii. El Elyon (God Most High).
 1. Speaks to the supremacy and sovereignty of God; that there is nothing and no one close to him in supremacy (Deut. 32:8, Ps 92:1).
 - iii. El/Elohey Olam (God Everlasting).
 1. Speaks to the eternity of God (Ps. 90:2, 93:2).
 - iv. El Khayyim (the Living God).
 1. God is life himself and therefore is the source of all life for all things. Also speaks to his authority over all the living (Deut. 5:26, Ps. 84:2).
1. Adon/Adonai (Lord)
 - i. This is the Hebrew word which is translated "Lord," (not all caps).
 - ii. The term can be used of humans out of respect ("master," "captain").
 - iii. When used of God, it refers to his supreme sovereignty over all things and authority over everything external to himself (Gen. 24:18, Ex. 21:4-8).
- m. Tsur (Rock)
 - i. God is often spoken of as a rock, which refers to his unmatched strength and consequent perfect reliability (Deut. 32:4, Ps. 18:31).

Deut 32:4 For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God
- n. Ab (Father)

- i. Speaks to God's fatherhood of the elect. From the moment of salvation, God is our father. The NT applies the name "Father" to the first person of the Trinity (Deut. 32:6, Eph 1:3).

3. The Perfections/Attributes of God¹

a. Introduction

- An attribute is an essential characteristic of God's nature.
- Attributes are not who God is some of the time, but who he is at all times.
- And, attributes are things that we can know about God; about his essence.
- Recall, the most relevant, essential issue for any culture in any time is God.
- Every defect in a person or a culture can be traced back to some wrong understanding or application about the character of God.
- God is the essential piece of knowledge, which means, God's attributes are the essential knowledge.
- However, some theologians say that is preferable to speak of God's "perfections" as opposed to his attributes.
- He is perfect in all of his being and doing. God's character is perfect. Therefore, his attributes are expressions of perfection.
- God's attributes must be revealed by God. Thus, special revelation – the Bible.
- Man's attempt to describe God from sources other than the Bible will result in aberrant ideas of God. God's description of himself is exactly who he is.
- God is. His perfections are fixed and absolute. Thus, man may not say things like, "To me, God is..." It matters not what we suppose God to be. God is as revealed from Scripture.

¹ See *Biblical Doctrine*, eds. MacArthur and Mayhue, pp. 160-188.

- Also, we must not think of God's perfections as we think of the characteristics of people.
- People are changing; sometimes for the better, sometimes not. Believers are being sanctified. We are growing and maturing, by God's grace.
- But God is unchanging (Mal. 3:6). He never needs to improve. So, when we speak of his attributes, we are not talking about something he became or was, but has always been from eternity past and will be to eternity future.
- Caution: when we speak of God, we must remember that we are speaking about God. We are not speaking about our favorite baseball player; we are not speaking about our kids; a political figure; or even our spouse
 - We are speaking about a Being who has no parallel; no equal; no rival.

"To whom then will you liken Me that I would be *his* equal?" says the Holy One. (Isa 40:25)

- Thus, we must speak with humility, reverence, worship, and we must also do everything we can to speak truthfully.
- In theology, we do not seek to be profound, but accurate, or truthful. Why?

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

- It seems that there are at least 3 tools which are essential to theological accuracy:
 - Biblical submission/humility is an essential tool which gives a man theological accuracy
 - Biblical familiarity
 - Regeneration (1 Cor 2:14-16)
- Finally, recall Job's attitude towards theological accuracy:

"Then Job answered the LORD and said, ² 'I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ³ "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.' ⁴ "Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me." ⁵ 'I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; ⁶ Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes'" (Job 42:1-6).

- And, recall what God said to Job's friends regarding theological accuracy:

"It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you *according to your folly*, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has'" (Job 42:7-8).

b. The Incommunicable Perfections

- God's perfections can be divided into **2 categories**: *incommunicable* and *communicable*.
- **Incommunicable** perfections refers to those attributes of God which he alone possesses. In other words, these are characteristics which are unique to God. They are not communicable to the creature.
- No creature shares these attributes.
- **Communicable** perfections are those which we, as image-bearers, share, though only to a certain degree.
- For example, one of God's communicable attributes is love. Humans can also be loving. So, love is a communicable attribute.
- This is not a perfect, hard-and-fast way to categorize God's attributes, as we will see, but it does provide a way to sort them out a bit.

i. **Aseity**

God is self-sufficient in his being. He depends upon nothing apart from himself for existence. God is the absolute and only source of life and sustenance for all things, whether a rock zipping through space

in another galaxy; a microscopic thermophile living in an underwater ocean geyser thousands of feet down; the sun; or you, all things derive their existence and continuance from the God of the Bible. God is self-existent.

For this reason, prior to creation, God did not need anything for his existence. He existed before there were things; the universe; space; and time.

If God needed space, mass, and time to exist, he would not be self-existent, nor God. God did not need geographical location or a space to exist b/c he does not depend on anything except himself for existence.

That cannot be said about you.

- A man might boast, “I am self-sufficient. I need no one.” He lives in the middle of the forest. He builds his own house out of wood; burns wood for eat; hunts; makes a cistern for water; uses animal fat and oil for light, and there he is.
- But, is that self-sufficient? In no way. He is no more self-sufficient than a man in ICU on life-support. Why? That boastful braggard is living entirely off of God and God’s resources. He eats, breathes, chops wood, and hunts on life support, himself; his life is supported by almighty God.

Scriptural basis:

- God depends upon nothing

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24-25).

App: stand in awe of him

- God is self-existent

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”” (Exod. 3:14).

App: worship and fear him above all; there is no one like him

- God is both prior to, and the source of, all things

“Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Ps. 90:2).

App: trust that he is sufficient to provide our needs

ii. **Immutability**

God is unchanging. He will not change because he is perfect in all of his being and doing.

There can be no improvement upon God because God is the fullness of all perfection in his being. There can be no deterioration in God’s perfection because he is unchanging.

Furthermore, since he is self-existent and independent of all things, there are no circumstances, forces, or any outside influence that could subject the perfection of his being to deterioration.

Again, this emphatically cannot be said of us. We are in desperate need of improvement. And much of what constitutes Christian maturity is an awareness of that.

Scriptural basis:

- God does not change

“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6).

App: trust that his word is always perfect, never needing “updating”

- God is eternally the same

"Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. ²⁶ Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. ²⁷ But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end" (Ps. 102:25-27).

App: comfort that God will reign forever

- God is incorruptible

"Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures" (Rom. 1:22-23).

App: praise for his greatness

- God's sovereign will is unchanging

"for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

App: peace, that he will not forsake us/our salvation

- And brothers & sisters, how critical it is that his will is unchanging. B/c when he set out to save you and all the elect, nothing will deter him from doing so.
- Why is that so important? OPEN UP - b/c there are plenty of things we think, do, and say that could be deterring; sinful; repulsive.
- But, he will see us through to eternity

*Objection to immutability: What about those passages which say, "...and God relented of the disaster..."? (cf. Jonah 3:10).

- This cannot mean that God did not know what would happen, since that would contradict many passages of Scripture which declare that God knows and decrees all things (cf. Eccles. 7:14, Isa. 46:9-11).
- This cannot mean that God changed his eternal decree, for he is unchanging/immutable (Ps. 90:2, Mal. 3:6).

- The apparent changes/relenting of God, therefore, coincide with his eternal omniscience and sovereign will. During these situations, God is not learning new things, being updated, or changing his plan.