

"Milk & Meat" - Answering Questions on Christianity

Life Bible-Presbyterian Church Adult Sunday School

Many people react negatively to the word "theology" or "doctrine" thinking that it is dry, useless arguments that have no relevance to daily Christian living. Theology is derived from the Greek word *theos* meaning God and *logos* meaning word, or rational thought. As such, theology is sometimes called the science of God - study of God and his relation to the universe. Every Christian is a theologian. Any time we read the Bible or listen to a sermon and strive to understand God's Word, we are engaging in theology. The Bible is a large book written over 1,600 years. It comprises different genre: poetry, prophecy, wisdom, narrative, and letters. Much of what is written seems strange and very different from our modern day experience. All of this can make it difficult for Christians to discern the Bible's basic themes and topics. Therefore, it is helpful to put the Bible's varied teachings in a systematic, organised and topical grid or framework. Systematic theology is the attempt to organise the whole system of thought found in the Bible into a unified system.

Over the next few months, we will attempt to survey the basic truths of the Christian faith, so that we may know God for who He is, and what He has done for His people in this world and the next. The topics we plan to cover are: theology (study of God), anthropology (study of man), Christology (study of Christ), pneumatology (study of the Holy Spirit), soteriology (study of salvation), ecclesiology (study of the church), and eschatology (study of the end times).

Objectives:

1. Fundamental doctrines for the healthy growth of every Christian (Acts 2:42, Rom 16:17, 1 Tim 4:13, 16, 2 Tim 4:2,3, Titus 2:1, 2, 3,).

2. Apologetics: equipping you with truth and Scripture and "*be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear". 1 Peter 3:15.

3. Why Milk & Meat?

(a) Younger believers need Milk. 1Pet. 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the sincere **milk** of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"

(b) But we need Meat to Mature in Faith (Grow to be Strong Christians).

- "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of **strong meat**. 13 For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe." Heb 5:12.
- "That we *henceforth be no more children*, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;" Eph 4:14.

References:

- Life B-P Church website "*Frequently Asked Questions*" [LWeb]
- *Now, That's a Good Question*, R.C. Sproul [Sproul]
- *Who Made God? and Answers to 100 Other Tough Questions of Faith*, Ravi Zacharias, N Geisler [ZG]
- *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, William Evans [Evans]
- *Through Jewish Eyes*, Craig Hartman [CH]
- *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Robert Reymond [RR]
- *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF), *Larger Catechism* (LC), *Shorter Catechism* (SC)

KNOWING GOD - Theology

1. Who is God?

- a. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth (Shorter Catechism Q.4).
- b. "God is a Spirit ... " (John 4:24). He is invisible, and does not have a body like man. The only way we can see God is indirectly through His reflection in the things that He has made.

- c. He is eternal, and existed from eternity past to eternity future (Psalm 90:2). He is unchangeable (Mal 3:6). He is Almighty, All-powerful or Omnipotent (Rev 4:8). He is also merciful, gracious, longsuffering, full of goodness and truth (Ex 34:6-7).

2. Who Made God?

- a. No one did. He was not made. He has always existed. Only things that had a beginning - like the world - need a maker. God had no beginning, so God did not need to be made.
- b. He is eternal, and existed from eternity past to eternity future (Psalm 90:2 "... from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.").

3. How do we Know that God Exists?

- a. The Bible does not attempt to prove the existence of God. It just assumes it. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)
- b. The existence of God is obvious to all who will listen to the testimony of creation: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." (Psalm 19:1).
- c. Only fools refuse to believe that God exists: "The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God*. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, *there is none that doeth good*." (Psalm 14:1)

4. I am quite confused about the relationship between God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. How are they related? If Jesus is God, Father is God, Spirit is God, then don't we have 3 Gods?

- a. Trinity - God is One in Three Persons (The Triune God). "There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." Shorter Catechism Answer to Q.6.
- b. There is only one God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Jesus showed that He and the Father are one God when He said "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30).
- c. God exists in three distinct persons. Christ commanded us to baptise "...in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" (Matthew 28:19) - notice that it is "name" and not "names", indicating that there is only one God. In Gen 1:26-27, God said, "Let us make man in our image" and "... so God created man in His own image" - plurality of persons in one God. Eg. God is like a triangle - it has three corners, and yet one triangle. Or, God is like one to the third power (1^3) i.e. $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. God is one God, manifested eternally and simultaneously in three distinct persons.
- d. The Triune God performed different functions. For example, in the redemptive work of the Godhead (Eph 1:13-14): God the Father elected some (decreed, predestined and chose); God the Son procured redemption (incarnation, atoning sacrifice); and the Holy Spirit applied the benefits of redemption to the elect (regeneration, sanctification). The Father sent The Son (John 3:16) and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26).
- e. Errors concerning the Trinity. Jehovah's Witnesses erred in believing that only Jehovah is God (Jesus is a created being, not self-existent as the Father), and that the Holy Spirit is merely a name for the power of God (not a person as the Father). Mormons are polytheists (many gods) as they believe there are more than one god, and these "gods" are not identical in essence and substance. Modalism believes God exists in 3 persons at different times - a heresy because all three persons of the Godhead manifested themselves at the same time (Mt 3:16-17).
- f. A Mystery. Norman Geisler: "Of course, the Trinity is a mystery. It goes beyond reason without going against reason. We can apprehend it, but we cannot completely comprehend it. As someone wisely said, "If we try to understand God completely, we lose our mind, but if we do not believe in the Trinity sincerely, we will lose our soul.""

- 5. I'm told that God (reveals) makes Himself known to man. How is that so?**
- Natural/General revelation - Nature.** Romans 1:19-21 tells us that God has revealed Himself through nature and creation - His glory, wisdom, power, righteousness and divinity. The Psalmist says "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament (i.e. *expanse, the sky, space*) showeth His handiwork." (Ps 19:1). No one can claim ignorance of God as an excuse for refusing to honour Him as man are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). Man possesses a conscience (Rom 2:14-15) - the law written in their hearts i.e. man made in God's image have an innate sense of right and wrong (however blunted by sin) in the conscience. For this reason sin is restrained even in non-believers. In the light of this revelation, the whole world is without excuse if they reject God. However, this knowledge of God perceived through nature is insufficient to lead one to salvation or to the conscious choice of good or evil.
 - Special revelation - Scripture.** Hence, God gave His Word and revealed His salvation plan for sinners through His Son. True saving knowledge comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed in the Scriptures (Ps 19:7-11; Jn 20:31; Heb 1:1-3; Heb 2:1-3; 1 Jn 5:13). God revealed Himself through theophanies (Ex 33:9), prophecies, miracles, Christ the logos (Jn 1:1-14) & the express image of God (Heb 1:1-3).
- 6. What rule has God given to direct us on how we may glorify and enjoy Him?**
- The word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him. (SC Q.2)
 - 2 Tim. 3:16 "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."
- 7. What is your understanding of God?**
- Some in the Christian community think of God like some kind of Santa Claus whose main attribute is love. The Bible certainly puts a lot of emphasis on the love of God, and that God is love. However, that is by no means the only characteristic of God.
 - God is also holy and just. If we strip God of His justice, wrath, and sovereignty, then we are worshipping a god who is in fact an idol. If we read only the New Testament, we will have a partial understanding of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. To have a full-orbed understanding of the triune God, we must read the whole of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. We must know God the Father, God the Son Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit.
- 8. What are the Attributes of God?**
- Incommunicable attributes.** These are characteristics and qualities of God that are not found in man eg. He is infinite, eternal (Ps 90:2), independent (Acts 17:25), omnipresent (Jer 23:24; Ps 139:7-12), and unchangeable (Mal 3:6), whereas man is finite, temporal and changeable. He is transcendent - "otherness" or "apartness"- God is infinitely majestic in all of His being than any creature. He is independent and self-existent; whereas man is dependent on God for existence.
 - Communicable attributes.** These are the perfections of God in which some faint likeness can be found in man. They are communicated to man in some degree so that they might reflect, though imperfectly, the image of God eg. God's wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Of course there is a difference between God and His image (man) in these attributes. For example, God's wisdom is always infinite, eternal and unchangeable, whereas man's wisdom is finite, temporal and changeable. *Omniscience* - God knows all things (Job 11:7-8, Ps 147:5; Prov 15:3; Mt 10:29), all affairs of man (Prov 5:21, Ps 139:2). *Omnipotence* - God can do all things (Job 42:2); nothing too hard for Him (Gen 18:14); even Satan has no power over God's children unless God permits (Job 1:12, 2:6).

- 9. If God is a Spirit, then why does the Bible speak of God *as if* He had bodily parts: "the hand of the Lord" (Josh 4:24), "the eyes of the Lord" (1 Kings 15:5), "his feet" (Ex 24:10)?**
- God is said to have hands, feet, arms, eye, ears; He sees, feels, hears, walks, etc.
 - This is anthropomorphic language, i.e. they speak of God in such a way to express in human terms so that we could understand God.
- 10. What was it that the elders of Israel saw when they "saw the God of Israel: and *there was* under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in *his* clearness." (Ex 24:10)?**
- No man had seen God and live (Jn 1:18). Evidently, the elders saw the essence of God, rather than God as He really is - an appearance of God in some form to their outward senses. This is apparent from the omission of the definite article before "God" (in Hebrew).
 - Perhaps they saw God in the form of a man ("feet" was mentioned). The vision was too bright for human eyes to gaze upon fully, but it was a vision of God. Ex 33:20-23 tells us that we cannot see God's face, but we can see His "back parts" (v.23), which probably refers to the after-effects of God's radiant glory which had just passed by.
- 11. Some people claim that God speaks to them. Is it true that God speaks to some people? How is it that I have never heard God speaking to me?**
- God does not ordinarily speak to His people in an audible voice today. Those who claim to see visions of God or hear Him speaking to them all the time may be misled by their own imagination or even by some deception of Satan.
 - God has chosen to speak to His people through His written Word, the Bible. (2 Peter 1:16,19 "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ... We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:") When a born again Christian reads the Bible, the Holy Spirit takes the words he reads and personalises it to him. As a result, he becomes deeply convicted that the words he reads are meant for him personally. In this sense, a Christian can say, "The Lord spoke to me." (1 Cor 2:10-16).
- 12. What is the sovereignty of God? How do you reconcile with man's free will?**
- God reigns and is in control, not bounded by His creatures or time. "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places." (Psalm 135:6). He is the most High God possessor of heaven and earth (Gen 14:19).
 - His will is supreme and unfettered. " *I am* God, and *there is* none else; *I am* God, and *there is* none like me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: ... I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it." (Isa 46:9-11). "the only Potentate, the king of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15), "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending ... which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1:8).
 - God owns what He makes, and rules what He owns. (R.C. Sproul). He is in absolute control of everything in heaven and earth, and rules and overrules affairs of man. If God is not sovereign, then He is not God. If there is a molecule of the universe that is outside of God's authority, control and power, then He no longer is God over all.
 - There is no contradiction between God's sovereignty and man's freedom. Human beings are given the ability to make free choices, but our freedom is a limited freedom defined by the sovereignty of God. We do not have autonomy to do whatever we want because our choices are subject to the sovereign judgment of God.