

UNIT 1: The Attributes of God

Section 1: Introduction to Theology Proper

Assigned Reading:

*A. W. Pink – The Attributes of God
PREFACE*

Introduction:

Jan 7, 1855: The Minister of New Park Street Chapel preached with the following introduction:

It has been said by some one that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God. We shall be obliged to feel— "Great God, how infinite art thou, What worthless worms are we!"

But while the subject *humbles* the mind it also *expands* it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. He may be a naturalist, boasting of his ability to dissect a beetle, anatomize a fly, or arrange insects and animals in classes with well nigh unutterable names; he may be a geologist, able to discourse of the megatherium and the plesiosaurus, and all kinds of extinct animals; he may imagine that his science, whatever it is, ennobles and enlarges his mind. I dare say it does, but after all, the most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently *consolatory*. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.

These words, spoken over 150yr ago, were voiced by C.H. Spurgeon @ 20yr old!

I. Defining Theology:

A. Etymology:

1. “theos” – God, “logos” – Word/Rational Expression = **lit.** “words/thoughts about God”
2. Christian Theology is the “rational interpretation of the Christian faith”

B. Categorizing Theology (Ryrie)

1. By era: Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, Modern, etc
2. By Viewpoint: Arminian, Calvinistic, Catholic, Baptist, etc
3. By Focus: Historical, Biblical, Systematic, Apologetic, Exegetical
 - a. **Historical Theology** – tracing theological thought throughout the eras...
 - b. **Biblical Theology** – usually concerned with describing theology presented in “book by book” format, giving much heed to individual context of bible books (e.g. Deuteronomy, James, Revelation, etc). This follows truth as a progressive revealing by God over the centuries...
 - c. **Systematic Theology** – **The logical, coherent, comprehensive organization of the teaching of Scripture for the purpose of intimately knowing and faithfully worshiping God.** The correlation of biblical revelation as a whole into a systematized overarching picture of God’s revelation. This takes into account all that we have been told by the Lord in the Scriptures!

If your knowledge of God does not transform you, you have not really encountered God.

William Perkins, *Golden Chain*: “The body of Scripture is a doctrine sufficient to live well. It comprehendeth many holy sciences, whereof one is principal, others are handmaids or retainers. The principal science is theology. Theology is the science of living blessedly for ever.”

W. G. T. Shedd (I,16): “Theology is a science that is concerned with both the Infinite and the Finite, with both God and the Universe. The material, therefore, which it includes is vaster than that of any other science. It is also the most necessary of all the sciences.”

Strong (p. 1): “Theology is the science of God and of the relations between God and the universe.”

Lewis Sperry Chafer (I,6): “Systematic Theology may be defined as the collecting, scientifically arranging, comparing, exhibiting and defending of all facts from any and every source concerning God and His works.”

Millard Erickson (I,21): “. . . that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the culture in general, worded in contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.”

Grudem (21): “*Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic.* . . . Systematic theology involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.”

- (1) **Culver**, “When what the church teaches is announced as it emerges portion by portion from the Bible the discourse is properly called *exposition*. The process of exploring texts and bringing out the meaning in preparation for exposition is *exegesis*. Particular teachings are *doctrines*. When these doctrines are organized into some logically coherent arrangement there is *systematic theology*.”
- (2) Meaningful study of any subject cannot avoid organized, systematic arrangement of the data... *ex) Botany, Zoology, Medicine, Law, etc.*
- (3) **III**) We do the same in our kitchens (putting things where they belong), or in our offices (filing papers such that they can be retrieved).
- (4) This is one of the disciplines of Bible Study that has been largely neglected much to our shame and disadvantage... Recall is so inhibited if information is not categorized and fitted with things already learned!

C. *Theology Proper:*

1. This is specifically the study of God Himself.
2. We'll be looking at the nature of God... specifically, qualities of the entire Godhead!
3. In a sense the “attributes of God” are merely different ways of viewing God’s unified “being” – *like looking at a multifaceted diamond from different angles...*

II. Overview of the Scope & Sequence of our Course

A. *Explain the next 23 weeks... Reading Assignments...*

B. *Explain that this study is a “subset” of Larger Systematic Theology Study*

III. The Importance of this Study

A. *The Great Commandments*

1. *1st Commandment: “No other gods before Me”*
 - a. This is not just a requirement to put God up as 1st among the gods (as in rank)
 - b. This is a statement made concerning: place no gods before God’s face! In other words remove them from His presence (as we will look at together, God being omnipresent requires that all other gods are to be rejected as utterly false and detestable. This argues for MONOTHEISM...
 - c. **Huge Danger:** Of thinking/believing wrongly about God! Idolatry is not merely bowing down to an idol fashioned by hand (**Is 44**), but any wrong thinking regarding God... inventing a “god of the imagination” (**Rom 1:18-25; Ezek 14:3-11**)
 - d. **A.W. Tozer**, “The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is – in itself a monstrous sin – and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness... The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.”
 - e. **Acts 17:29** “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.
 - f. **Psalm 50:21-22** “These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes.”²²
“Now consider this, you who forget God, Or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.

- g. **Ezekiel 14:3 God speaking**→“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?”→ The following context is great through v.11
- 2. *Greatest Commandment: “Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”*
 - a. OT: Deut 6:5, 11:1, 11:13, 11:22, 13:3, 19:9, 30:6,16, Josh 22:5, 23:11
 - b. NT: Matt 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27
 - c. Summation of all of the Law – Love God with everything, and neighbor as yourself!
 - d. God cannot be foremost in our hearts if He is not foremost in our thinking!
 - e. **Tozer**, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.”
 - f. *A rightful understanding of God is foundational to Worshiping Him! If the foundation is insecure or inadequate, the whole structure is liable to collapse!*

B. The Great Lesson From Job

- 1. Job is an amazing lesson not only in shaping our theology but also in teaching us how we should think *about* theology.
- 2. V.1-6 the writer of the book of Job sets the stage, telling us about Job and his character.
 - a. V.1 tells us he is blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil
 - b. V.3 tells us of his impressive wealth → (if I had 3,000 camels **today** I would be rich).
 - c. V.5 tells us more of his godly character and his care for his children. Notice at the end of the verse it says “thus Job did continually.” Job was in the practice of godliness.
- 3. V.6-12 – rare insight into what is going on in heaven. We get to see what God is doing.
 - a. V.6 is a sort of angelic role call I can see it in my head, God calling the role “Gabriel!” “Here!” “Michael!” “Here!”
 - b. V.7 tells us of a dialogue between Satan and God (the fact that Satan is in heaven should mess with your theology a little). God asks Satan from where he has come and Satan gives him a half truth (a lot like us when we don’t want say what we have really been doing). Satan says that he has been merely roaming about on the earth but we know by the New Testament that when he does, he “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).
 - c. V.8 then God basically offers up Job. God says “So you’re seeking someone to devour huh? Have you thought about Job?” What should really mess with your theology is the reason God gives for offering up Job in verse 8 “**For** [signifying the reason] there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.” You say “Wait, why did God offer up Job? He is a good man. I thought God helps those who help themselves? I thought God blesses when we do right? You know I do this... God does that. I thought God protected the upright?” Well we see here God turning over one of His own to Satan for His own glory.
 - d. In vv. 9-10 we see this satanic theology coming out, which is what you hear in a lot of churches and on “religious” television, the idea that God wants only to bless you all the time and the idea of worshipping God based solely on what He has done for you and not for who He is.

- e. V. 11 Satan makes a wager that if God takes away Job's stuff, Job will curse God to His face. God's glory is at stake.
 - f. Then the most shocking thing of all happens God says "Ok go for it. All that he has is in your power." God gives Satan great power in wrecking havoc on this "righteous man," for God's own glory.
4. The rest of the chapter records the trials that come upon Job where everything is taken from him almost all at once and vv. 20-21 give us Job's reaction—he praised God and the writer tells us in v.22 that "through all this Job did not sin or blame God" (that is a much better reaction than us when we go through our petty stuff).
 5. Chapter 2 gives us another rare look into what is happening in heaven as we see another heavenly roll call.
 - a. V.2 is the same as the first encounter we see with God and Satan—God questioning and Satan giving a half-truth.
 - b. In v.3 God again offers Job up but He adds to His words that Job still holds fast his integrity as if to say "What's up now Satan? What happened to all this cursing me to my face stuff?" And God says "He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." That should blow your mind—God ruining righteous people *without cause*. We may be shocked at that because this is contrary to the contemporary lie. People teach all too often that God only wants to bless us all the time and "God helps those who help themselves." Some churches teach that if you have enough faith you never have to be sick and if you are sick it is because you have unconfessed sin in your life. But, you see, it is not about Job—God's glory is at stake in heaven. This goes against what most churches teach and what we see on much of "religious" television. Most people believe we should worship God and obey Him so He will bless us or they teach we should praise God for the things He gives us or does for us but Job teaches us to praise God because He is simply worthy of such. **We worship God because He is God and He is glorious.** Not that we should not be thankful for what He does for us and gives us but it should not be the basis of our worship because for His own glory God could take it away in an instant.
 - c. The prosperity message is Satan's message—just look at Satan's theology throughout this book "If you just take away his stuff..." and when that did not work we see Satan attacking Job's health, which God also allowed.
 - d. Vv.7-8 Job is covered with terrible boils and is using a piece of broken pottery to scrape them—this is a profoundly sad scene.
 6. Next in verses 11-13 we meet Job's friends who show up to see how he is doing. When they see him they are so stricken that they weep and sit with him in silence for seven days—they are really good friends...so far.
 7. What we see in the next chapter and for most of the book is speculation as to what God is doing. From chapter 3 until about 35 we see chapter after chapter after chapter of speculation as to what is going on and why.
 - a. Job's friends' theology is basically this: You do good = God's Blessings upon you, You sin = God's curses upon you. They thought "Job is being cursed, he must have sinned." They asked Job over and over if he sinned and they accused him repeatedly and each one of them was sure they knew what God was doing. The idea that Job was innocent just did not jive with their theology, which was just like Satan's I might add.

8. **Key Point:** It is almost monotonous, chapter after chapter of speculation. But remember that the author of Job has already told us what God is doing—so **everything that they talk about (chapter after chapter) that they say God is doing He is not.** They are wrong again and again.
9. Chapter 38 God shows up (you guys know the story) and rebukes Job’s questioning of Himself and answers Job with an almost endless series of questions with the point being “Let me be God and you be Job.”
10. In chapter 42 Job gets the point in vv.1-6 and in verse 7 we see the importance of saying about God what is right: “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.’”
11. This is picturesque language—God does not just say “I am angry” He says “My wrath is kindled” it is a picture like striking a match, and the reason God’s wrath is kindled is because they did not speak of God what is right.
12. **Key Point:** It is critical that we are correct in what we say about God because God hates when we say of Him things that are false. Saying things that are false about anyone in the human realm would upset or anger anyone, we don’t want to “spread rumors” about people and whatnot. We take steps to prevent those sorts of things. *How much more should we speak of God what is right. How could we “spread rumors” about God and not be concerned about it.*
 - a. This means we will have to keep our mouths shut a lot more.
 - b. This means we will have to study and be knowledgeable about God.
 - c. This means we must take seriously what we say about God.
13. A lot of people might say “Well, it really doesn’t matter, I mean God knows my heart, He knows what I mean...” Yes God does know your heart—it is deceitful above all else and desperately wicked, don’t appeal to your heart just be accurate or don’t say anything. Close is not close enough, we need to say what is right about God and studying theology seeks to do exactly that.

C. Our Greatest Need: Knowing God

1. **Jer 9:23-24** Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.
2. **Pink:** A Spiritual and Saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature. The foundation of all true knowledge of God must be a clear mental apprehension of His perfections as revealed in Holy Scripture. An unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped.
3. **It is the most practical thing to know the God whose world this is!**
4. **We exist to glorify God – to do this we must know Him!**
5. *Jesus explained in John 17:3 “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*
6. **The Key to our study:** We must ensure that our knowledge gained leads to humility and obedience before the Lord! We are to learn that we might KNOW Him!

D. Our Greatest Mission: Making God Known

1. Matt 28: Great Commission – “... make disciples... teaching them all I have commanded you”
2. Making disciples involves “evangelism” as well as “teaching” – this teaching is greatly enhanced with a thorough going collection and summarization of the Bible’s teachings!
3. **Discipleship: 2 Timothy 2:2** The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

E. The Greatest Result: Authentic, Biblical Christians for God’s Glory!

1. Systematic Theology ensures that we don’t come to improper conclusions about God without evaluating the entirety of the Scriptures (allowing scripture to interpret scripture)
2. “One goal of systematic theology and worldview thinking is to (1) expose inadequate justifications for belief and (2) provide a solid basis for validating or invalidating truth claims in order that we may have (3) a consistent and God-honoring foundation for godly living and servant-leadership.” (*From Lecture 2 “Worldview Systems” Paul R. Shockley*)
3. Systematic Theology ensures that we are able to identify the fraud should it surface... ill) Bank employees learn to detect counterfeits by examining genuine money!
4. Systematic Theology when done prayerfully, humbly, and reasonably in community results in mature, godly, involved, joyful, Christ-like people!