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January 8, 2018

The Existence of God Theology Proper - Part 1

In a book called *Knowing God*, author J.I. Packer begins the third chapter with some of the most important questions and answers that could ever be asked and can ever be answered. The chapter begins this way:

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set for ourselves in this life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight and contentment than anything else? Jeremiah 9:23-24, ²³ 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, ²⁴ 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." What, of all the states God has ever seen man in, gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself. Hosea 6:6, "⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

One of the most amazing thoughts that can ever enter our minds is that God wants us to know Him powerfully and God wants us to know Him personally. That is what Jesus prayed for us the night before the cross (John 17:3) and that is something the Old Testament prophets remind God's people over and over again. Knowing God flows from being known by God and being known by God means that we should want to know Him better.

As we begin a new study in the Grace Bible Institute, we need to pause and reflect on the fact that we are of all people most blessed. Why? God has chosen to enter into a personal and powerful relationship with us by sending His Son to die for us and sending His Spirit to give us new life in Christ. Ephesians 2:18, "¹⁸ For through him (Christ) we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

Paul reminded the Galatians of this amazing truth in Galatians 4:8-11. Paul takes the Galatians back in time to the pre-conversion condition and reminds them of the difference the gospel made in their lives.

Galatians 4:8-11, "⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."

I love how Paul writes about the time in their lives when they did not know God and then he writes "but now that you have come to know God or rather to be known by God." That's a Christian. Through the miracle of regeneration by the Spirit through the Word of God, people who had no hope and were without God in the world came to know Him through the transforming power of the gospel. Why? Because He knew them before they knew Him.

John MacArthur reminds us from Galatians 4:9 that, "We can know God only because He first knew us, just as we choose Him only because He first chose us (John 6:44; 15:16), and we love Him only because He first loved us (1 John 4:19)." That's what the Bible teaches.

A Christian is someone known and loved by God. Paul writes something similar in 1 Corinthians 8:3, "³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God." The fact that the Corinthians loved God showed that they were known by God. God knows us before we know Him and Him knowing us changes what we love and how we live. Everyone truly known by God loves God.

What do you want people to know about you? What's the most important description of a Christian? I think if our minds are working right the greatest privilege that we have and what should define each of our lives is knowing the God of the Bible ***powerful and personally***. The amazing thing is that is what God wants. John 17:3 makes it clear. The night before the cross, with Calvary coming, what was on the heart of our Savior was us knowing God.

Nothing can compare with us seeking to know God as He is

I pray that my three little girls see this desire in their daddy. My little girls still love me. They still kiss me on the lips. They still run up and give me hugs when I get home from church. When I open the garage door I usually see the door inside the garage open and I see little blonde haired girls come running out to my truck. I am soaking it up because I know rougher waters are probably ahead. I'm trying to build a relationship with them when the waters are calm so that when they get choppy they will keep running to me and I can keep taking them to the throne of grace.

I like what John Piper wrote in a forward to a book called *The Pleasures of God*: "If there is any legacy I want to leave with you, it is not money or house or land; it is a vision of God - as great and glorious a God as one could ever see. But more than that, I want to leave the legacy of passion for this God. A passion far beyond what any human can produce. *A passion for God flowing from the heart of God.* Never forget that God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in Him."

Let me remind you of a couple of important things about this class - The purpose of theology, the study of God is doxology, the worship or the praise of God. Remember that is what Jesus told the woman at the well God is looking for. John 4:23-24, "23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Peter reminded the church in 1 Peter 2:9-10 of our new identity and our purpose as people who have come to faith in Christ, "9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." The purpose of our calling is to praise the God who showed us mercy through Christ and made us His very own possession. He gives the grace and we give the glory.

One man puts forth the following challenge:

"Knowing about the Lord is pointless without worship and praise. After all, the Devil knows far more about God than we do, and yet this knowledge gives him no benefit because he refuses to bow the knee in humble adoration (James 2:19). Let us continually ask ourselves whether our study of theology is making us more arrogant and eager to pick fights with those less knowledgeable, or if it is making us worship the Lord in humility."

I also want you to remember the three fold purpose for the Grace Bible Institute:

The purpose of the Grace Bible Institute is three-fold:

1. Healthy Doctrine
2. Holy Living
3. Heartfelt Worship

I want to make sure you are all clear on where we are headed over the next three years. Lord willing, the next three years in the fall, winter and spring, we are going to cover 9 essential doctrines:

Over the next three years we will study 9 essential doctrines:

- Fall 2017 - God's Word - Bibliology
- Winter 2018 - God the Father - Theology Proper
- Spring 2018 - God the Son - Christology
- Fall 2018 - God the Holy Spirit - Pneumatology
- Winter 2019 - Man and Sin - Anthropology and Hamartiology
- Spring 2019 - Salvation - Soteriology
- Fall 2019 - Angels - Angelology
- Winter 2020 - The Church - Ecclesiology
- Spring 2020 - The Future - Eschatology

We started the Grace Bible Institute with bibliology. Why do we start with bibliology in a study of theology? Because we had to establish the fact that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant foundation for all human knowledge about God and how everything relates back to God.

"Theology proper, as with all other areas of systematic theology, is properly derived from God's own testimony in his inspired, inerrant Word, the Bible. One's concept of God does not come "from below," from human reasoning about the universe, because human reason is finite in its components and operations, corrupted by indwelling sin, and therefore never able of itself to derive an accurate understanding about God, who is infinite and holy. **Proof for God's existence must come, first and foremost, from God's testimony about himself. He has provided irrefutable proofs for his existence in the Bible.**"

This class is going to build on the doctrine of Scripture. The next 8 weeks we will look at what the Bible teaches about theology proper. This is the study of the essence, being, and triunity of God. We're going to take a Wednesday night tour through the existence of God, the names of God, we'll spend some time considering the communicable and the incommunicable attributes of God, the decree of God, the providence of God, the problem of evil and we'll finish with glorifying God. Fasten your seat belts because we're going to try and accomplish something in 8 weeks that we could spend a year studying together.

Over the next 8 Wednesday nights we're going into the deep end of the theological swimming pool. But this is what God wants for us and this is what is best for our lives. Listen to the counsel of Charles Spurgeon - **"Endeavor to know *the Father*. Approach Him in deep repentance, and confess that you are not worthy to be called His son; receive the kiss of His love; let the ring that is the token of His eternal faithfulness be on your finger; sit at His table and let your heart rejoice in His grace."**

Tonight we begin with the existence of God. In this class I am not going to go into a lot of cultural arguments against these things. I believe most of you are here, not because you care so much about what this fallen world thinks about God, but because you're chief concern is what God's Word says about God. If you know the truth you'll be able to defend the truth.

1. Scriptural Assertions of the Existence of God

Where should we begin to discuss God's existence? The best place to begin is the first verse of the Bible. If every word of Scripture proceeds out of the mouth of God we should start with the first verse of Scripture. If you get Genesis 1:1 wrong it is hard to get the rest of the Bible right. So, take your Bible and turn to Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

John Frame writes, "In the Bible everything begins with God. God is the ultimate context of the biblical story. In that story, everything is 'from him and through him and to him,' and therefore to His glory forever."

The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God. The Bible does not begin with a rationalistic argument for the existence of God. Scripture assumes that He exists, and that He existed before the beginning of all things outside Himself, and that there is only one God. There is rich foundational theology in Genesis 1:1. Jack Hughes is preaching on Genesis in Louisville, Kentucky and I heard he got through the first 3 words of Genesis 1:1 in his first sermon.

"Scripture asserts the existence of "the only true God" (John 17:3). The Bible begins with the foundational presupposition that God existed "in the beginning" (Gen. 1:1). So every statement from the Bible about God's nature and actions is proof from him of his existence."

John Frame describes creation as "An act of God alone, by which, for His own glory, He brings into existence everything in the universe, things that had no existence prior to His creative word.."

Every statement from the Bible about God's nature and actions is proof from Him of His existence

The Bible has no formal arguments or proofs for God's existence. Scripture declares to man what we already know in our hearts - that God is. There are a multitude of ways we could defend the existence of God from His Word. One could go on to

multiply biblical proofs of God's existence from all the scriptural statements about God's being and works, but we will limit the Scriptural proof to three examples:

a. From the Scriptural Assertion that God is eternal

The Bible teaches repeatedly that God is eternal. That means "God is without beginning, without ending, and without succession of moments in His experience and knowledge of Himself and of all reality outside Himself."

This is something God reveals to His people over and over again in the Old Testament. Moses, who the Holy Spirit superintended in the writing of the first five books of the Bible, wrote in Psalm 90:1-2, "**1** Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. **2** Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." Moses knew God gave birth to the earth because God revealed it to Him - whispered it in his ear because no one was there.

God used Isaiah to remind this truth to His people. In Isaiah 41:4, God declares, "I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he." Isaiah 44:6 adds, "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.'" Isaiah 57:15 affirms that God "inhabits eternity." This truth is one of the truths that separated the true God from all the other false gods that surrounded God's people.

One Scriptural proof of God's existence is that God is eternal:

b. From the Scriptural Assertion of God's Self-Existence

Remember how God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:7-13. Here is what God said to Moses before He led His people out of Egypt and they became a nation with God as their God in Exodus 19.

Exodus 3:7-15

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.' " ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

God told Moses by what name Israel was to know Him - LORD. **It means eternal existence, eternal presence.** YHWH is the proper name of God. It speaks of God's eternal and unchanging nature. We'll look more at the significance of the names of God next week. This is the name by which God reveals Himself to His people and no other nation had that name.

The second proof from Scripture of God's existence is eternal existence and His eternal presence:

c. From the Scriptural example of the Redemptive Requirement

Hebrews 11:6, "⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." The Bible teaches that everyone who wants to be rightly related to God must believe that He exists. The true knowledge of God comes through faith.

The Bible is also clear that to not believe God exists makes someone a fool. The Holy Spirit reveals this twice in the Psalms. Psalm 14:1, "The fool says in his heart, "There is

no God." Psalm 53:1, "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." The Psalm explains the problem of pride in this regard in Psalm 10:4, "In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

Romans 1:18-3:20 explains the depravity of man - what sin has caused. Romans 1:19-20 makes it clear that everyone knows God exists through what has been made, "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." We are fallen sinners and yet responsible for the revelation we have.

General revelation makes us responsible to God for our sin but we need Special Revelation to lead us to the Savior from our sin

So, if God has not left Himself without a witness, why do so many people deny His existence? It's not an intellectual problem - It's a moral problem. It's a sin problem. It's a worship problem. Paul goes on in Romans 1:21-23, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." **Human beings are foolish, not in the sense that they are intellectually deficient, but in their rejection of God's lordship over their lives.**

"Idolatry is the greatest insult the creature can offer the Creator."

Charles Spurgeon

2. The Knowability and Incomprehensibility of God

"Scripture teaches that man may know God truly, yet not exhaustively. In the classical terminology, God is truly knowable but not exhaustively comprehensible."

a. *God's Sufficient Knowability*

From the very beginning of the Bible we learn that God can be known. He can be known intimately. This is a theme that we can trace through Scripture. Genesis 3:8 shows us how God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:24).

God appeared to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:3-4, "So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." He gave His law to Moses at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19.

Throughout the history of Israel we see how God made Himself present in the tabernacle and in the temple on the mercy seat on the top of the ark of the covenant. 1 Samuel 4:4, "So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits *above* the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God." 1 Kings 8:10-11, "It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord."

The Bible reveals that God can be known but the Bible also reveals that God does not reveal all that can be known

b. *God's Incomprehensibility*

Though God can be known truly, Scripture also reveals that God is not comprehensively or exhaustively knowable to humans in any aspect of his being or actions. We are limited by time and space and by indwelling sin. Notice this contrasts between God and man:

"God is eternal and holy, transcending time and space, infinitely omniscient, and absolutely morally pure. God alone is great. Man was created as a different and inferior order of being. Even in his originally created state, humanity could not know God exhaustively, but after the fall of Adam, even the knowledge humans can have of God is corrupted by sin."

Psalms 145:3, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable." The root from the Hebrew word unsearchable means searching exhaustively. No one can fathom how great God is. He cannot be fully searched out. 1 Timothy 6:16, "God dwells in unapproachable light that no man has seen or can see."

Adding to the biblical affirmation of God's incomprehensibility is the fact that he has not revealed to us all that he is or all that he knows. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "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." God reveals what He wants us to know, not all that can be known. According to Revelation 10:4, John was commanded not to write something he had witnessed: "And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.'"

In Psalm 139:6 we see how God's thinking transcends man's intellectual capacity, process and output. Psalm 139:6, "6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it." Later in the same Psalm David writes in verses 17-18, "17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you." Psalm 147:5 says that God's understanding is beyond measure. A classic verse on this is Isaiah 55:9, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"

Wayne Grudem summarizes the incomprehensibility of 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 (Ps. 145:3), his understanding (Ps. 147:5), his knowledge (Ps. 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, and so forth. 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" (Ps. 139:6)."

As we wade through the waters of deep thinking, I'd like to end with a bit of a personal challenge. Turn in your Bible to Jeremiah 9:23. I read these two verses earlier but I want to show you something about the pursuit of knowing God better that we have to keep in mind. Jeremiah is ministering to the people of God before the Babylonian exile. God is about to bring in the Babylonians to discipline His people for their sin. Jeremiah 9:23-24 reveals one of the problems that got the people of God into trouble with God.

Jeremiah 9:23-24, "²³ 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, ²⁴ 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."

Notice what it means to know God. To know God, to understand God leads to practicing what God delights in. God revealed Himself to Israel so that Israel could reveal God to the pagan nations. There was a missionary purpose. Israel failed here. Why? Because they didn't boast in the Lord and they didn't reflect the Lord.

Andy Snyder warned his seminary class at The Master's Seminary, "For the person who spends time and great mental energy tying the bows around his philosophical theology proper and comes away from that discussion without any increased demonstration of love, justice and righteousness in his life has not come to know God."

People in the Bible who come to know God are truly transformed. As we begin this class on theology proper we need to begin with the fact that in the weeks ahead we will be going deeper and deeper into who God is because that is vital to our lives. But

the goal of knowing God is always transformation into His likeness - To love what God loves and to hate what God hates.

“Kindness” (*ḥesed*) refers to God’s loyal love (cf. 31:3; 33:11; Lam. 3:22). God would stand by His commitment to His people. “Justice” (*mišpoṭ*) is a broad term that pointed to governing justly. God would vindicate the innocent and punish the guilty.

“Righteousness” (*ṣedāqâh*) conveys the idea of conforming to a standard or norm. God’s standards of conduct were supposed to be Israel’s norm.”

May we learn from Israel's negative example so that we don't fall into a similar sin of knowing the Lord but not boasting in Him and not seeking to practice the things that He delights in.

Next week we will consider the names of God. Let's pray.