

THE STUDY OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

CEDAR CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGY PROPER

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this class

- The stated purpose of this class is to introduce the church to theology in general and to the operation of systematic theology specifically in order that it would lead to richer doxology.
- As we learn more about God, more about who He is, how He interacts with us and in His creation, it should produce in us an unspeakable joy, and unshakeable confidence, and an overall resiliency to follow Him.
- This class is going to pinpoint Theology Proper or the Doctrine of God.
- The purpose of this is to familiarize the church with the stated doctrine and show how the Bible describes or supports each doctrine.
- Our first two classes are establishing several points which are necessary before studying God's attributes.
- If we start with just a study of God's attributes, it becomes just learning facts about God. When we talk about God being holy, wrathful, love, eternal, immutable, and every other attribute, it should be more than just ideas and concepts, but cause our minds to be in awe and our hearts to be filled with joy.
- Theology should ultimately lead to richer _____

The hope/goal of this class

- The goal of this class is that each person would realize not only the value found in studying theology but come to realize that every person (Christian and non-Christian alike) is a theologian.
 - This means that every single person on the planet has a belief system about God...it does not mean that every person believes the truth.
- The atheist acts according to their understanding of God as does the Muslim, Buddhist and any other religion. The difference with the Christian is that God has revealed Himself to us in His word.
- We are going to take our time going through this teaching series so that each of you can walk away with a deeper, richer and fuller understanding of who God is and what our responsibilities are towards Him.

- When we study who God is and what He has done, we can come to a more complete understanding of Him which then corresponds to a holier and more sanctified life.
- We should *never* study theology for the purpose of studying theology. If our study of theology does not lead to doxology (praise) then we are certainly misplacing our priorities.
 - As Paul exclaims in **Romans 11:33** “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”
- Another hope of this class is to introduce you to other theologians and their belief systems. I hope to be able to expose you to a variety of Christian thinkers who have sought to not only study and learn but teach and apply what they have mined from the pages of Scripture.
 - The purpose is for you to have a well-rounded understanding of what we are discussing.
- There is an obvious contrast in systematic theologies. While some are written for a purely academic audience, others have a stronger emphasis on personal and pastoral application.
 - I hope to give a mixture of both, to stretch you in your understanding and to exhort you in your living. We learn best when we apply layers of understanding, moving broader and deeper into what the Bible says.
- There are three main reasons why I think it’s good to read broadly:
- First, we do not want to live in an echo chamber where our own thoughts and beliefs are simply affirmed back to us.
- Second, we want to be challenged in our thinking by men who have differing opinions and applications within their doctrines.
- Third, these men, while they may not hold to every point of theology that we do, are still our beloved brothers in Christ and have all earned a place in the history of the church.
- As we work through these lessons, it is important to ask questions and seek understanding.
- As believers, we don’t want to walk away without knowing what the Lord desires us to know.
- Every person is a theologian because every person has a _____ about God.
- What does it mean to say that theology should lead to doxology?

WHAT IS THEOLOGY / SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY?

- What is theology?
 - Simply put, it is the study or science of God.¹
 - There are two Greek words, *Theos* (God) and *Logos* (word, study, discourse)
 - Therefore, it is the study of God.
 - While theology covers all that Scripture teaches generally, our concentration in our complete study will be Theology Proper, or the doctrine of God Himself.
 - To study God, we must not just study *who God is*, but also, because He is an active God, His work in creation, redemption and His interaction with humanity.
 - Theology is “the discipline that strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of the culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.”
 - Erickson’s definition includes five key areas for our full understanding of Theology:
 - Theology is biblical (it has an objective basis)
 - Theology is systematic (it is organized; not chaotic)
 - Theology relates to issues of our general culture (God is not removed from His people)
 - Theology contemporary and uses language to explain timeless concepts and thoughts (God communicates to His people in a way they understand)
 - Theology is practical (there is an expectation of doing what we know)
 - Joel Beeke defines theology as “...theology is quite broad, including an exposition of all the truths about God and his relationship to man as recorded in the Bible.”²
 - This is similar to Erickson. Theology is broad, it is grounded in the Bible, and it speaks directly to our relationship with God.
 - B.B. Warfield wrote, “Theology and religion are parallel products of the same body of facts in diverse sphere; the one in the sphere of thought and the other in the sphere of life.”³
 - What these men are simply saying is that without proper theology, we will not be able to live properly before God. What we learn through theological studies should constantly be shaping our understanding of God and thus constantly correcting and forming our lives to Him.
 - We cannot just say *I don’t understand therefore I don’t have to obey...*
- What is systematic theology?

¹ Erickson, M. (2013). *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic .p.8

² Beeke, J (2019) *Reformed Systematic Theology* Vol. 1, Wheaton, IL, Crossway, pp. 40-41

³ Warfield, B (1981) *The Idea of Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, p. 57

- Systematic theology is one of the main branches of theology. It seeks to show what the whole Bible teaches about a given topic and its relation to other topics.
- Systematic theology “it seeks to give a systematic presentation of all the doctrinal truths of the Christian religion.”⁴
- There has always been push back regarding systematic theology.
 - Most saying that God cannot be put into a *system*.
 - Charles Spurgeon responds “Systematic Theology is to the Bible what science is to nature. To suppose that all the other works of God are orderly and systematic, and the greater the work the more perfect the system: and that the greatest of all His works, in which all His perfections are transcendentally displayed, should have no plan or system, is altogether absurd.”⁵
- Theology is the study or science of _____?
- Theology proper refers to the doctrine of _____.
- Systematic theology seeks to show what the whole _____ teaches about a given topic.

WHY IS THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY IMPORTANT?

- The reading, studying and knowing of systematic theology is not something that should be left up to the “religious elite.” There are many resources which are available for people to read, study, and apply from devotional material to high level academics.
- According to Kevin DeYoung, there are six main reasons why⁶:
 - **The Bible’s interest in truth demands it.**
 - As Christians we should have a passion for truth, just as the Bible does. We are transformed by the truth and then are called to walk according to the truth.
 - We need to know the truth *before* we can please God.
 - Right now, our culture is in a struggle for truth. They are looking for truth and coming up short.
 - For example, Jesus tells His disciples in **Matthew 16:25** “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”
 - There are many truths here that our culture needs to hear:
 - You can’t find life outside of Jesus.
 - Jesus is the center of all life.

⁴ Berkhof, L (1979) *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, pp. 58-59

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, as quoted from *Biblical Doctrine*, John MacArthur (2017) Wheaton, IL, Crossway, p. 36

⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/why-should-we-study-systematic-theology/> 09/04/2020

- Kingdom life is upside down...we must die to truly live.
- The more one searches for life in this world, the worse off they become.
- **Our view of Scripture demands it.**
 - All of Scripture is breathed out by God. This means that everything in the Bible matters.
 - **2 Timothy 3:16** “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...”
 - It also means that everything in the Bible possesses a fundamental unity, coming as it does from the same author.
 - **2 Peter 1:21** “...for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
 - Systematic theology seeks to make the comprehensive unity seen and savored.
 - Approximately 40 authors who wrote over 1500 – 1600 years scattered across 3 continents (Africa, Asia, Europe).
 - The Bible reads not as a random set of writings, but as one unified document that continually points to the greatness of God and the necessity of Jesus Christ.
- **Realism about human intellect demands it.**
 - One way or another, we will come to conclusions about the most important religious questions. *Who was Jesus?*
 - What is the human predicament? Is there hell? How can we be saved? How should we treat each other? What does it mean to be a good person? Why is there something around us rather than nothing?
 - As soon as we set out to answer these questions we are engaging in systematic theology. The human mind can't help but synthesize and organize.
 - **2 Timothy 3:16-17** “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; [17] so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
 - Teaching (doctrine): this establishes our framework for what is true. It answers the fundamental questions about life, God, the afterlife, etc.
 - Reproof (what is not right): the Word then confronts us where we are not right in our thinking and systematically exposes our hearts.
 - Correction (how to get it right): the word means *restoration to an upright or right state; improvement of life or character*. The Word provides systemic steps to rebuild.

- Training in righteousness (how to stay right): the Bible contains the ongoing structured plan for a life full of wisdom, joy, and ultimately salvation.
- **The history of the church demands it.**
 - Why can't we just let the Bible speak for itself? Because that's not what we see in the Bible, the nation of Israel, or in the early church.
 - In **Nehemiah 8:8** "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading."
 - In **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."
 - In **2 Timothy 1:13-14** "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. [14] Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."
 - God has always given his people teachers to not only read Scripture but to communicate and guard the truth of Scripture.
 - The study of systematic theology for those who teach mean they have a full understanding of what the Bible says about a given topic.
- **The unity of the church demands it.**
 - True unity is not possible apart from robust theological fidelity. Church unity requires doctrinal agreement.
 - **Ephesians 4:4-6** "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."
 - How can we contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) if we do not have a deep understanding of that faith?
 - When we stand together on biblical truth, we are then able to show the world unity around what the Bible says, not around our own personal preferences.
- **The duty of the church demands it.**
 - Why waste time on systematic theology when there are people who need to hear the gospel?!
 - This is a very common argument. People believe that we should not be studying the Bible and growing in knowledge...there are people dying out there!
 - We study because those people need to hear the true gospel.
 - If we are to proclaim the message, we must know what that message is.

- We owe it to each other, we owe it to other churches, and we owe it to the world to give a clear articulation of our faith.
- Clarity requires carefulness, carefulness requires precision, and precision requires systematic theology.
- **Hebrews 4:12** “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
 - God’s Word is *able to judge*. God’s Word is skilled and fit for judging. It is able to trace out and pass judgments on our minds.
 - Scripture is God’s way of showing us the difference between our needs and our wants. It is the ultimate diagnostic tool to mine out the deep hidden things in our hearts.
- If theology is the study of God, then our most foundational question is: *Who is this God that we are studying?*

WHY BEGIN WITH THE DOCTRINE OF GOD (THEOLOGY PROPER)?

- “The knowledge of God is ultimately the sum of all other doctrines; there is no sense, there is no meaning or purpose, in any other doctrine apart from this central, all-inclusive, doctrine of God Himself. There is no point in considering the doctrine of salvation, nor the doctrine of sin, unless we have started with the doctrine of God.”⁷
 - In other words, if theology is the study of God, and if sound theology is essential for the Christian life, then where should we begin? We begin where Scripture begins: God Himself.
 - Why is it important to begin with the doctrine of God before studying other doctrines?
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How does the Bible introduce us to God?

- **Genesis 1-3** not only gives us an account of the beginning of all of mankind but also gives us an introduction to who God is. He is mentioned 32x’s in Gen. 1 alone. What can we learn about God from these first three chapters?
 - God is...

⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (2003) *Great Doctrines of the Bible* Vol. 1, Wheaton, IL, Crossway p. 47

- Always been...never created...never a time when He was not...independent of anything
- There is a God and He has spoken
- God creates
 - God is the one who acts...He is the uncaused cause and the source of all created power
 - God designs
 - Physics, laws of nature, humans over animals...He is intentional
- God's standards
 - His standards are a reflection of who He is
 - God's authority
 - Where and what Adam and Eve could eat
 - He placed the waters and land where they would go
- Genesis 1 teaches that God is the _____ cause and the source of all created power.
- What are two truths about God that are evident from Genesis 1-3? _____

Knowing the incomprehensible God

- “Because God is infinite and we are finite or limited, we can never fully understand God. In this sense, God is said to be incomprehensible.”⁸
- It is for this reason that God would never have been known unless He revealed Himself.
 - **Romans 1:19** “because that which is known about God is evident within them; *for God made it evident to them.*”
 - **Matthew 11:27** “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and *no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*”
- The knowability of God is not found in the world's or man's wisdom.
 - **1 Corinthians 1:21** “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”
- His greatness is incomprehensible
 - **Psalms 145:3** “Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable.”
- His understanding is incomprehensible

⁸ Wayne Grudem (1994) *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, p. 149

- **Isaiah 40:28** “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.”
- **Psalms 147:5** “Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.”
- Declarations of God’s limitlessness from Scripture
 - **Job 11:7-9** “Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.”

While God can never be known comprehensively or exhaustively, He can be known truly.⁹

- God is knowable by what He has revealed to man:
 - God’s revelation about Himself is true, accurate and trustworthy therefore He can be known truly and accurately
 - God can only reveal these things that are true about Himself.
 - When the Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8); God is light (1 John 1:5); God is spirit (John 4:24); God is righteous (Rom. 3:26); these things are absolutely true.¹⁰
 - His own revelation about Himself can and should be trusted.
 - **Hebrews 6:16-18** “For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. [17] In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, [18] so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.”
 - God’s promise and His oath with His promise.
 - Man was created to live with knowledge of God.
 - **Genesis 1:1** “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
 - We can know God and that He spoke so we can understand.
 - **Hebrews 1:1-2** “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, [2] in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

⁹ *Biblical Doctrine* pp. 146-147

¹⁰ Dr. Matt Waymeyer

- The Bible never seeks to defend or prove the existence of God; it simply states that He is and always has been.
- **1 John 5:20** “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding *so that we may know Him who is true*; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”
- **Jeremiah 9:24** “...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.”
- God would never have been known unless He _____ Himself.
- God can never be known exhaustively, but He can be known _____.

General and Special Revelation from God

- There is general revelation and the need for special revelation to know God. This is of the utmost importance for the Christian to understand for all aspects of their life.
- How can one truly know God and what knowledge God requires to bring them to salvation?
- This is where we would have to answer several questions, *can man be saved apart from special revelation? Is seeing God’s creation and/or our own inner conscience enough for us to be born again? Can my intellect and reasoning bring me to a right knowledge of God?*
- God is knowable because He made Himself knowable.
 - General revelation: in my opinion, there is no better place to see the stark contrast between General and Special Revelation than **Psalms 19**.
 - **Verses 1-6** speak of how we know God through nature
 - **Verses 7-14** speak of how we know God through His word
 - Not only do we have **Psalms 19**, but also **Romans 1:18-20** “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 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.”
 - Between **Psalms 19** and **Romans 1**, it is obvious that God has revealed Himself in both creation and our conscience.

- That is why man will stand before God without excuse as God either condemns him or redeems him. Throughout the entire world, from the outermost bush of the African plains to the most densely populated areas of India...God is displaying His glory for all to see.
- Part of General Revelation is man himself; as we were all created in the image of God. Human nature is imprinted with a representation of God.
- Even though man is fallen and in a sinful state, he still bears marks of being created in God's image.
- "...man is a rare example of God's power, goodness, and wisdom, and contains within himself enough miracles to occupy our minds."¹¹
- Have you ever thought about all the miracles which take place in our bodies all the time just to keep us alive, talking, seeing, walking, running, etc.?
- General revelation is not something that is potential, as if the person has to recognize it in order for it to *be* revelation.
 - General revelation is actual, not potential, revelation. As Psalm 19:1 says...*the heavens declare*...The responsibility is not on God to reveal Himself so that people will know, He has already.
 - This is why people, all people, will stand before God without excuse.
 - Nobody will be able to say that they did not know.
- God is knowable through the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
 - Special revelation is revelation that identifies the source of wisdom, salvation and joy not as general, but being the actual Word of God.
 - It is *special* because it is not granted to all mankind through natural means, but to select people through supernatural means who then, in turn, tell it to other people.¹²
 - Christ is the mediator of divine (special) revelation:
 - Jesus said in **Matthew 11:25-27** "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that *You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants*. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and *no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*."
 - Jesus and Peter in **Matthew 16:15-17** "He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. "And Jesus said to

¹¹ John Calvin *Institutes of Christian Religion* Book 1, Chapter 5, section 3

¹² J. Beeke *Reformed Systematic Theology*, p. 264

him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

- Special Revelation only takes place through the Son according to the Father’s will, revelation is an act of divine sovereignty, in which the Father hides himself from some sinners but reveals to others, not according to their worthiness but according to his good pleasure.¹³
- **Matthew 13:11** “Jesus answered them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.’”
- The Holy Spirit is the effective agent of Special Revelation in the Son.
- **2 Peter 1:21** “...for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

- What is the difference between general revelation and special revelation?

- General Revelation is seen in creation and in man’s _____.
- According to Romans 1, why are all people without excuse before God?

- Special revelation ultimately centers on the person of _____ Christ.

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

- Which truth about God from this week's study most increased your worship of Him? Why?

- How can a deeper knowledge of God help you live a more faithful Christian life this week?

- Is there an area where you have been content with knowing about God rather than knowing God? Explain.

¹³ Ibid. p. 267