

GOD

The study of God is called *theology*. Many people think of theology as a difficult, boring and impractical subject which should only be studied by scholars or seminarians. Is this true?

Certainly the study of God can be difficult. Indeed, it is impossible for us with our finite intelligence even to begin to know God. But God has not left us on our own, to grope for answers in the dark. He has shown us what He is like, because He wants us to know Him. God's revelation of Himself to us is what makes theology possible.

The study of God it is anything but boring. What could be more exciting than to learn about the One who created us and the world we live in? Indeed, the reason so many people lead aimless, empty lives is that they do not know God, the Source of life, and so do not know what life is all about. If we do not know God, we cannot truly know ourselves or the purpose of our existence.

Impractical? On the contrary, theology is essential, because knowing God is essential.

How does God reveal Himself?

God makes Himself known to us in several ways:

Creation -- We can learn a great deal about God by looking at the world He has made. This is called *general revelation* because it is given in a general way to the whole world. The vast, magnificent universe bears witness to the wisdom, power and glory of God, its Creator (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19, 20). We ourselves, created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), have minds that reflect His intelligence, and consciences that attest to His righteousness. God's general revelation is obvious and inescapable. Every time we open our eyes we are presented with His handiwork; every time we take a breath we are reminded of His faithfulness in sustaining our lives.

Scripture -- The knowledge of God we can obtain from creation is limited, but God has given additional *special revelation* of Himself in the Bible. Through the Holy Spirit, God inspired the authors of Scripture to record certain of His words and deeds, giving us a more complete picture of what He is like (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible contains accounts of God's dealings with mankind, truths godly men have learned from and about Him, and messages spoken directly from God to us. In all of this, God tells us about Himself.

Special Visitations -- The Bible describes how God has sometimes appeared to people in dreams, visions and other extraordinary experiences. These were invariably powerful and life-changing events (see Exodus 3:1-6; Isaiah 6:1-8; Acts 9:1-8). God still meets or speaks to people in such ways, at times and places of His own choosing.

Jesus Christ -- The fullest and most complete revelation of God is found in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus is called the Word, because He is the perfect expression of what God reveals to us of Himself (John 1:1). In Christ, the Divine took human form in order that we might look upon the invisible God (John 1:14; Colossians 1:15). In Christ, God spoke with a human voice and was seen, heard, and touched by human hands (1 John 1:1-2). If we want to see God, we need only look at Jesus (John 14:7-10).

The Holy Spirit -- Our most direct and personal knowledge of God comes from the Holy Spirit who comes to live within us. Through the Holy Spirit, God draws near to us and makes Himself known to our hearts (John 14:15-23). What a precious privilege, to know God in such a close and intimate way!

God's People -- We should also note that God created humankind in order to reflect His image (Genesis 1:26-27), and that He chose Abraham and the Jewish race to testify to the rest of the world

about what He is like (Genesis 12:1-3). Of course, sin and disobedience have marred the human reflection of God and tarnished the testimony of His people. Now it is the church which has been called to show the world what God is like (Matthew 5:16, 48). As the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; John 20:21), we are to continue carrying out His task of revealing the Father. Often God makes Himself known through the attitudes and actions of His people (1 John 4:12). People who don't read the Bible should still be able to see God in us!

Is there more than one God?

There is only one true God, supreme Creator of heaven and earth (Deuteronomy 4:39; Isaiah 45:18). He alone is worthy of our worship. To be sure, there are other spiritual beings with powers and modes of existence beyond our own (i.e., angels and demons). But these are also created beings subject to and dependent upon the one and only God. All other so-called "gods" are false, either dumb idols or demonic impostors (1 Corinthians 10:20).

The one and only God exists in three Persons, in what we call *Trinity*. The three Persons of the Trinity are one in substance, nature and purpose. They have existed from all eternity in a state of perfect harmony and love. God's personality is the foundation and model of human personality; the inter-relationship within the Trinity is the foundation and model for all human relationships.

The Trinity is a difficult concept for us to understand, but we cannot expect to be able to comprehend fully the nature of God. Just remember: not three Gods, or three parts of God, but one God in three Persons.

Who are the Persons of the Trinity?

The Trinity consists of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). All are divine and co-equal. They can be distinguished by the relationships they have to each other, and by the roles they adopt in relation to us.

God the Father created the universe through the agency of God the Son and the power of God the Holy Spirit. Similarly, God the Father redeemed His creation through the agency of God the Son and the power of God the Holy Spirit.

God the Son has existed eternally in a loving and submissive relationship with God the Father (John 1:1). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Son became incarnate as the man Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully human. He lived in perfect obedience to the Father, and worked miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. He died in our place to make amends (atone) for our sins, was raised by the Father through the Holy Spirit, and now reigns as King over all. From His throne at the right hand of the Father, He pours forth the Holy Spirit upon His people (Acts 2:32-33).

God the Holy Spirit is now continually at work in the world, convicting people of sin (John 16:8), and drawing them back to the Father through the Son. He glorifies the Son and leads people to faith in Him (John 16:14). He applies the salvation purchased by the Son, giving new life to those who believe in Him. The Spirit is sent into our hearts by the Father to testify that we are His children (Galatians 4:6). The Holy Spirit lives within believers, filling them with the power and love of God (Romans 5:5; 8:11).

The Father is God above us, the Son is God alongside us, and the Holy Spirit is God within us.

What is God like?

God is eternal. The first words of the Bible are "In the beginning God..." Before the universe existed, before there was anything else, there was God (Psalm 90:2). The cosmos did not cause its own existence (a logical and metaphysical impossibility); matter, space and time were brought into being by the eternally existing God. He alone is independent and uncreated (Acts 17:24-25). He was, He is, and He always will be (Revelation 4:8). God is the great I AM (Exodus 3:14), the self-

existing One. If God did not exist, nothing else would, or could. He is the ultimate reality which grounds the existence of everything else.

God is infinite. God is spirit, not enclosed or limited by a material body (John 4:24). He is infinite in presence (*omnipresent*), not confined to one location (Jeremiah 23:24, Psalm 139:7-10). He is infinite in knowledge (*omniscient*), so that nothing is hidden or unknown to Him (Psalm 94:7-11). He is infinite in power (*omnipotent*), so there is nothing too difficult for Him (Jeremiah 32:27).

God is sovereign. God brought the universe into being out of nothing (Genesis 1:1). The universe is not a manifestation or a part of God, but a separate creation, dependent upon God for its continued existence. God reigns over His creation, and nothing in it is outside of His control. He did not just create it and then leave it to run on its own. He is not an absentee landlord. It is He who determines the course of history, and though He grants a measure of freedom to His creatures, He maintains ultimate control over all that happens (Psalm 135:6). His moral will may not always be done, but He turns even the disobedience of men and angels to the service of His plans. His purposes cannot be frustrated (Daniel 4:35).

God is personal. God is not some cosmic "force" that permeates and energizes the universe, which we can manipulate or use for our purposes. He is not a vague "influence," but a Person who thinks, feels, speaks, plans and acts. He is not less personal than we are, but more so (Psalm 94:7-10). He has a distinct character and will; He can be pleased or offended, known or ignored, obeyed or disobeyed, loved or despised.

God is holy (Isaiah 6:3). Holiness entails perfection, purity, majesty and glory. God is perfect in righteousness, pure and

uncontaminated by any form of evil (1 John 1:5). He is supreme in value and worth. He lives in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16), and is the source and ideal of all goodness and truth. His judgments are in accord with perfect justice. There is none like Him in all of heaven and earth (1 Samuel 2:2).

God is love (1 John 4:8). God's heart is a heart of love. Every instance of human love we experience or witness -- the love of a mother for her child, the love between husband and wife, the love which binds two people in friendship -- all are pale imitations of the love which overflows from the heart of God. God's love is abundant enough to envelop the vilest sinner and redeem him back to Himself. The love of God is measured by the depth of His sacrifice for us on the cross of Calvary (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10). Who can comprehend such love as this? Who can refuse it?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read Jeremiah 10:1-16.

1. How is the true God different from the false gods made by humans?

Read Jeremiah 9:23, 24.

2. What is more valuable than wisdom, power and wealth?

3. What does God delight in?

4. How can we know God better?