

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: The Existence and Knowability of God

Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010

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## Introduction

In our previous studies, we have been examining the Doctrine of God's Word – the Bible as the inspired word of God, and as such, its inerrancy, authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency. These truths about God's word will serve as the foundation of our subsequent studies as we examine scripture's teaching on the Doctrine of God.

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## The Existence of God

1. Read Romans 1:18-32. From this text, how does one know that God exists? (cf. Acts 14:16,17; Psalm 19:1-6; Gen 1:1)

- EXTERNAL WITNESS: Evidence in nature

- v.20 "For his invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived... in the things that have been made" – the testimony of creation (especially man himself – created in God's image – Gen 1:27)

- Acts 14:8-18 – God's "good / kind" acts – His provision of "food and gladness" to man in nature (through rain & fruitful seasons), ie. aspects of God's character are revealed...

- Ps 19:1-6 – the declaration of the heavens and the sky above – that goes throughout the earth – ie. the message is clearly proclaimed and to all of the earth.

- INTERNAL WITNESS: Humanities "inner sense" of God – in these verses, there is implied, an awareness of God's existence

- v.19 – "what can be known about God is plain to [non-believers]"

- v.21 – "they KNEW God..."

- v.25 – "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie" – implies that all possess the truth but actively / willfully rejected that which they knew – cf. v.32

- The position of scripture (see prev studies re: authority of scripture) – the bible assumes that God exists: "In the beginning God" (Gen 1:1)

2. In spite of this, some still deny God existence (v.28). What do the following passages teach us regarding the heart and motivation of those who take on this position? (Why would you want to suppress the truth of God's existence?)

- Rom 1:18; Psalm 14:1; Psalm 10:3-4

- wicked, foolish, greedy, proud – expressions of self-dependence / rejection of God's sovereignty and wisdom – an ACTIVE denial of God's truth (see also Rom 1:23,25,28,32)

- Rom 1:20

- not due to ignorance / lack of clarity – "without excuse"

- 2 Cor 4:3-4

- the influence of Satan on an unbeliever's heart – blinding those who have do not accept the truth which has been presently plainly (v. 1-2)

3. How does a believer's awareness of God differ? (see Rom 8:15,16; Eph 3:14-19; Phil 3:8-10; 1 Pet 1:8,9)

- Rom 8:15,16 – God as our heavenly FATHER (and ourselves as His children) -

- Eph 3: 14-19 – Christ (and the Father), living within us / dwelling in our hearts (see also John 14:23)

- Phil 3:8-9 – the value that we attach to knowing Christ ("surpassing worth" vs. all other things worthless)

- 1 Pet 1:8-10 – "Though you have not seen [Christ], you love him." (vs. a fearful awareness of a cold and impersonal God)

- In contrast to the description in Romans 1, we are to seek the truth with wisdom provided by the holy spirit, and through scripture, we develop a deeper understanding as He has revealed.\

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## The Knowability of God

4. What does it mean to *know* someone? (compared to knowing *about* someone?) According to Jeremiah 9:23-24, what should be the source of our joy and value?
  - we are to find “glory” in understanding and knowing God – ie. His ways and the things He delights in.
  
5. How can we come to know God?
  - 1 Cor 1:18-21, 2:1-5, 14
    - 1:18 – through the word of the cross, we come to know God – in contrast, human / worldly wisdom alone is inadequate
    - 2:14 – through the counsel of the Holy Spirit – in contrast, the “natural” person (who lacks the Holy Spirit) does not accept / is not able to understand the things of God
      - recall from above – sinful man suppresses the truth
  - Matthew 11:27; recall: Rom 1:19
    - the necessity of God to reveal himself to us
    - Matt 11:27 – “...those to whom the son chooses to reveal [the Father]”
    - Rom 1:19 - “For what can be known about God is plain to them *because God has shown it to them*”
  - John 14:6, also 1 John 5:19-20, John 14:16-17
    - through Christ alone... “*No one* comes to the father except through [Christ]”
    - 1 Jn 5:19-20 – the world “lies in the power of the evil one” but through understanding that is from Christ, “we may know him who is true”.
    - also: with the help of the Holy Spirit reminding us of what Christ has taught us (Jn 14:16-17)
  - 1 John 2:3-6
    - a true claim to personal knowledge of Christ must be accompanied by obedience
  
6. To what extent can we know God? (see Ps 145:3, 147:5; Isaiah 55:9; cf. Psalm 139:1-18) How should we respond to this truth? (see Rom 11:33-36, Col 1:9-10)
  - As finite man, we can never fully understand God (who is infinite)
  - Psalm 145:3 – His greatness = *unsearchable (ESV) / no one can fathom (NIV)*
  - Psalm 147:5 – His understanding = *beyond measure (ESV) / has no limit (NIV)*
  - Isaiah 55:9 – His ways & thoughts = *higher than our ways...*
  - By comparison... He knows us fully (Ps 139) – and our response is that we treasure his thoughts (139:17)
  - Potential response: discouragement (if our goal is to equal God in knowledge), indifference
  - As Paul responded after recounting God’s wisdom in the history of Israel and His plan for the redemption of Gentiles – we can respond in PRAISE.
  - Col 1:10 – it should be our ambition for ourselves and those we serve to be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (and there will always be more to learn about God... and more reason to praise Him)
  - Also: humility, repentance
  - \*\* Heaven is NOT a boring place... a place that we can look forward to (cf. Heb 11: 13-16)

*" No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God... 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. 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." – C.H. Spurgeon (quoted in Knowing God, JI Packer – p14-15)*

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## Bringing it home: Doctrine Alive!

We know God exists because we have an inner sense of His existence, because of the testimony of creation and the teaching of scripture. However, Satan seeks to blind us of this truth, inciting our sinful nature to suppress the truth. Only God can overcome our sin and enable us to be persuaded of His existence and only through Jesus Christ can we begin to know God personally as our heavenly Father. Our knowledge of God is not a collection of meaningless trivia but rather a rich personal relationship which gives our lives perspective and purpose. In repentance and obedience, begin today to take hold of the eternal blessing and privilege we have to understand and know God.