

THE EXISTENCE AND KNOWABILITY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY PROPER

- Theology Proper is the investigation into what may be known of the existence, persons and characteristics of the triune God
- “Theology” is from θεός(*theos*)= “God;” and λόγος(*logos*) =“word”
- Theology vs. Theology Proper
 - Theology is a broad term that can include biblical, systematic, apologetic, historical, practical, etc. theology
 - Theology Proper is limited simply to the existence, personhood, and attributes of God Himself

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THEOLOGY PROPER

It is Foundational to Everything

- Westminster Confession Question #1: What is the Chief and Highest End of Man?; Answer: Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever
- *“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us...worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move towards our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. 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. Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, “What comes into your mind when you think about God?” we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, we might be able with some precision to foretell where the Church will stand tomorrow...That our idea of God correspond as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us...A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.” ~ A.W. Tozer in The Knowledge of the Holy, 1-2*

It is Necessary for Godly Living

- *“Nothing changes a human being faster than a deeper understanding of who God is” ~ R.C. Sproul*
- *“To have God in his mind and thought is the believer’s constant source of strength. The martyr languishes in the flames but his mind flies upward to God his Savior and looks forward blissfully to the glory that awaits him even as his body sinks to ashes. The imprisoned Christian forgets the harsh regime of the camp, the daily grind and grueling labor, as his mind soars upward on the wings of hope to remember God. The weary missionary, struggling with unfamiliar syllables and convoluted grammar in his appointed sphere of service sees beyond the frustrations of the hours as he remembers God...the faithful pastor of a congregation, entombed in his study and confronted with an impossible daily agenda of duties, brightens in his heart and feels his pulse quicken as he remembers his Master above. The thought of God enlivens all actions. The thought of God should be the Christian’s panacea. It should cure all his ills at a stroke. And what an infinity there is in the thought of God! Nothing can approach in beauty to the idea of the true and living God” ~ Maurice Roberts in The Thought of God, 4-5*

- *“People are starving for the greatness of God. But most of them would not give this diagnosis of their troubled lives. The majesty of God is an unknown cure...The greatness and glory of God are relevant. It does not matter if surveys turn up a list of perceived needs that does not include the supreme greatness of the sovereign God of grace. That is the deepest need. Our people are starving for God.” ~ John Piper in The Supremacy of God in Preaching, 9, 11*

It is Being Distorted Today

- *“It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity...Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear...The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God. Before the Christian Church goes into eclipse anywhere there must first be a corrupting of her simply basic theology. She simply gets a wrong answer to the question, ‘What is God like?’ and goes on from there. Though she may continue to cling to a sound nominal creed, her practical working creed has become false. The masses of her adherents come to believe that God is different from what He actually is; and that is heresy of the most insidious and deadly kind.” ~ A.W. Tozer in The Knowledge of the Holy, 2, 4*
- *“It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable...Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God’s existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, [and] his judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news...That is weightlessness. It is a condition we have assigned him after having nudged him out on the periphery of our secularized life.” ~ David Wells in God in the Wasteland, 88, 90*
- *“The tendency to treat God like a wax figure who can be reshaped according to human tastes and fashions is certainly nothing new. It is a form of idolatry that has been around at least since Sinai, when the disobedient Israelites portrayed Jehovah as a golden calf. A similar but subtler kind of idolatry is currently having a heyday in the church” ~ John MacArthur in foreword to Made in Our Image, Steven Lawson, 9*
- *“I believe that if there is one area of our theology that is most lacking in the church today, it is our understanding of who [God] really is. Our most rudimentary problem is that we do not fully comprehend who He is. Our thoughts about Him have become very unclear, fuzzy, and oblique. The result of this distorted view of deity is that it leaves everything else out of focus as well. Whenever we lost a right view of God, everything else gets out of perspective. Sad to say, we are suffering from a low view of God – an impoverished vision of Him as a god with manlike characteristics. A ‘user-friendly’ god has become the trend of the day – a god made in our image, an inversion of the truth of man made in His image. Human qualities and finite limitations have been assigned to the One who exceeds our comprehension.” ~ Steven Lawson, Made in Our Image, 15*

EXISTENCE OF GOD

Denial of God

- *“When I look up at the starry heavens at night and reflect upon what it is that I really see there, I am constrained to say, ‘There is no God’ ... It is not the works of some God that I see there...I see no lineaments of personality, no human traits, but an energy upon whose currents, solar systems are but bubbles.”~ John Burroughs*
- *“He was a wise man who invented God.”~ Plato*
- *“I don’t believe in God because I don’t believe in Mother Goose.”~ Clarence S. Darrow*

Necessary Perspectives

1. **The Scriptures never attempt to *prove* God exists; throughout the Bible, the existence of God is taken for granted**
 - The Scriptures never seek to prove the existence of God, but rather assume it

- Someone may say—the Bible doesn't prove that God exists—that's right—it assumes it which is a good argument in and of itself

Genesis 1:1 ~ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ~ Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Isaiah 40:12-31

John 1:1 ~ In the beginning was the Word...

Romans 1:18ff

- Revelation always comes after existence.
 - We cannot have revelation unless God exists—seems obvious but is critical.
 - If God does not exist then what we have is not revelation-it is merely man's ideas.
 - It essentially comes down to faith—not blind faith, but ultimately faith—which is a gift of God.
- The person of God is seen on every page of Scripture as He reveals Himself in words and actions
- Nowhere does the Bible seek to prove God's existence...He is its one overall presupposition
- Thus, while proving the existence of God is impossible, the evidence of His existence is everywhere

2. Ultimately it is impossible and futile to seek to prove the existence of God to an unbeliever. Because of their presuppositions they already reject what they know about Him.

- A presupposition is to pre-suppose something. Presuppositions are critical because:
 1. They affect a person's entire way of thinking.
 2. Frequently people are unaware of them
 3. They do not change easily
 4. Many times they are not based on the truth

Psalm 14:1 ~ The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

Romans 1:18-19 ~ 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.

2 Corinthians 4:4 ~ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Ephesians 2:1-3 ~ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

3. We must be careful not to resort to mere philosophical reasoning when it comes to the existence of God

Colossians 2:8~ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

- This verse is a warning to not be influenced by non-Christians way of thinking. It shows what is not valid: Philosophy, Empty Deception, Elementary principles of the world

- These cannot be relied upon because there is no spiritual power within them to address the spiritual issue going on in a person's heart

4. None of the following arguments carry absolute conviction or spiritual power

- They are not independent proofs of the existence of God
- Only the Word of God carries the necessary power to change people's hearts and minds

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.

2 Timothy 3:16-17~ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

1 Corinthians 2:1-6~ And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. ⁶ Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away

5. There is relative value, though, in the following arguments for the existence of God

A. They can bolster/affirm our faith.

- They affirm that Christianity is not just a blind leap of faith
- They give us greater confidence as we share Christ
- They encourage us in the face of opposition

B. They can be used to give answers to sincere questions from those whom the Spirit is working in.

1 Peter 3:15~ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

6. These arguments are cumulative in that, a single argument for the existence of God is inadequate, but when taken together they offer a solid evidence for God's existence

7. The closer these arguments are to relevant biblical truth and specific passages the more value they have

- These arguments integrated with Scriptural truth can be used with great effectiveness

8. Ultimately faith must precede full understanding

Thus, for those who are correctly evaluating the evidence, everything in Scripture and everything in nature proves clearly that God exists and that he is the powerful and wise Creator that Scripture describes him to be. Therefore, when we believe that God exists, we are basing our belief not on some blind hope apart from any evidence, but on an overwhelming amount of reliable evidence from God's words and God's works

Wayne Grudem

Traditional “Proofs” for the Existence of God

Background:

- The proofs for the existence of God have been constructed by philosophers and theologians at various times in history to persuade people that it is not rational to reject God’s existence
- The rational arguments for God first in a Christian perspective were first systematized by Thomas Aquinas in the 1300’s

1. The Cosmological Argument: A Question of Beginnings

A. The Argument

- Every effect must have a cause sufficient to produce it
- There must be a first cause in the universe....There must have been a time when the world was not, and something or someone had to have created it in time past
- Very basic—if you see a house—it was built by someone—so also the truth of creation demands a creator-God
- This line of evidence depends on 3 presuppositions: 1) every effect has a cause; 2) the effect depends on the cause for its existence; 3) nature cannot originate itself
- Our conviction is that the eternal being that caused the cosmos is God
- This doesn’t mean that the universe reveals all the details of God but it does mean that there is a living, powerful, intelligent being who caused the universe
 - Living because non-life cannot produce life
 - Powerful because of the very nature of what was formed
 - Intelligent because of the order and arrangement of the cosmos
- Question: Does the matter of cause and effect also apply to God?

B. The Evidence

Psalm 19:1-6

Romans 1:18-32

Colossians 1:16,17 ~ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.

Hebrews 3:4~ For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

C. The Problem

- This argument alone (without Scripture) does not necessarily identify the one true God as the first cause behind the universe

2. The Teleological Argument: A Question of Design

A. The Argument

- The Teleological Argument comes from the Greek word *telos* or “end” - The world everywhere shows indication of intelligence and purpose; therefore there must be an architect behind this design.
- The complexity of the universe suggests an intelligent author; the design we observe in the world calls for a designer
- This argument implies what the Cosmological argument is lacking; the world contains evidence of intelligence and design
- Random action could never have produced the highly integrated organization which we observe in the world
- The world reveals intelligence, order and harmony, and therefore this would argue for an intelligent purposeful being that created it
- Random action could never have produced the highly integrated organization which we observe in the world

B. The Evidence

Psalm 19:2 ~ Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.

Proverbs 20:12 ~ The hearing ear and the seeing eye, The LORD has made both of them.

Romans 1:20~ 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.

Acts 14:15-17~ Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

C. The Problem

- Though this argument points to a great and intelligent architect, it does not prove that he is God.
- How do we know there is a single designer?
- How do natural disasters show design?

3. The Anthropological/Moral Argument: A Question of Man

A. The Argument

- A person's intelligence and morality must have had for its author an intelligent and moral being
- Mankind's intellectual capacity of reason, conscience, and volition do not allow material and unconscious forces to be a sufficient cause
- Never has something impersonal brought into existence something personal...God is not just a force, but has personality
- Man has a sense of right and wrong; Therefore, there must be a universal moral Being that placed this in man
- How can man, a moral, intelligent, and living being, be explained apart from a moral, intelligent, and living God?

B. The Evidence

Genesis 1:26~ Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

Acts 17:29~ Being then the offspring 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.

Psalms 94:9~ He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see?

Romans 2:14-15 ~ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them

4. The Ontological Argument: A Question of Existence

A. The Argument

- This argument was presented by Anselm and rests on the fact that all men have an awareness of God.
- All individuals possess the idea of a perfect being in their minds.
- The fact that I can conceive of a perfect being outside of my mind implies that being's existence outside of my mind.
- Among all peoples and tribes of the earth, there is a universal sense of the divine which results in some type of religious expression (Even though all except true Christianity are false).
- Because the concept of God is universal, God must have placed the idea within man
- The argument goes like this: a) we have an idea of a Most Perfect Being; b) the idea of a Most Perfect Being includes existence, since a Being, otherwise perfect, who did not exist would not be so perfect as a Being who did exist; c) therefore, since the idea of existence is contained in the idea of the Most Perfect Being, that Most Perfect Being must exist

B. The Evidence

Romans 1:19~ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

C. The Problem

- This argument has limited value and has questionable usefulness.
- This argument is weak because we cannot deduce real existence from mere abstract thought – i.e. just because the idea of a tooth fairy exists does not prove the reality of a tooth fairy

Conclusions

- These arguments (without Scripture) are not proofs but rather come from our presuppositions...they only show probability, not certainty
- For believers, they are confirming evidence for our belief in God
- For the unbeliever, they have some value, but without Scripture, they cannot reason anyone into heaven due to the condition of the human heart
- If these arguments do not lead to the God of the Bible, they will lead to an idol

They are valid in that they correctly evaluate the evidence and correctly reason to a true conclusion - in fact, the universe does have God as its cause and it does show evidence of purposeful design...the actual facts referred to in these proofs, therefore, are true and in that sense the proofs are valid...But in another sense, if 'valid' means 'able to compel agreement even from those who begin with false assumptions,' then of course none of these proofs is valid because not one of them is able to compel agreement from everyone who considers them.

Wayne Grudem

- Bottom line: must choose to believe by faith in God as revealed in Scripture

The only "proof" of the Christian position is that unless its truth is presupposed there is no possibility of "proving" anything at all.

C. Van Til

THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

The Incomprehensibility of God

1. Definition

- Because God is infinite and humans are finite, human beings can never fully understand God
- It is impossible for us as finite creatures to have complete, unexhausted knowledge of God; God cannot be grasped in His entirety

2. Theological Basis

- A. Humans in their essence and being are different from God
- B. Humans in their knowledge think on a different level – Man can think God's thoughts after Him but never greater
- C. Thus, humans do not overlap with God in their essence or knowledge

3. Scriptural Basis

Psalm 145:3 ~ Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable.

Psalm 147:5 ~ Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

Isaiah 40:18~ To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

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.

Job 11:7-8~ “Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? 8 “They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?”

Romans 11:33, 34~ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?

Knowing God

- Though incomprehensible, God is knowable

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.

John 17:3~ “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

1 John 5:20~ And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might 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.

- What does it mean to know God?
 1. To believe the truths that God has revealed about Himself
 2. To allow the truth of God’s person and work to permeate every aspect of our being.
 3. To joyously honor Him by finding our greatest satisfaction in Him.
- God can be known but our knowledge of Him is inexhaustive and imperfect
- This should motivate rather than hinder us because the source of our greatest joy is absolutely inexhaustible
- It is limitless therefore we should be driven to know Him as the source of our greatest satisfaction

The Source of Man's Knowledge of God

1. General Revelation
 - A. What is General Revelation? – General revelation is the disclosure of God in nature and the conscience of man whereby all people gain a rudimentary understanding of God
 - B. Why is it General? – It is not specific details about God.....It is universal....It does not lead to salvation
 - C. What is the Impact of General Revelation?
 - Positively: All people everywhere acquire a rudimentary knowledge of God as the powerful creator of the universe
 - Negatively: The sinful heart consistently suppresses the knowledge derived from nature about Creator God
 - Overall: Man’s deliberate repudiation of this knowledge establishes his guilt-worthiness
 - D. What kind of knowledge of God does the unsaved have?
 - No unregenerate can start from scratch in an attempt to establish whether or not God exists

- Every human being already is aware of the true God and already has responded disobediently and dishonestly to this awareness
- The unregenerate, though acquainted with God, distorts, ignores, suppresses and disobeys this knowledge
- The unregenerate thus has no knowledge of God involving faith, submission, and obedience

E. Can people come to a saving knowledge of God through general revelation alone?

- Scripture nowhere teaches with reasonable clarity that general revelation brings persons to a saving knowledge of God
- No one seeks after God (Rom 3:11-12)
- General revelation is partial and obscured by sin (Rom 8:19-22)
- The result of general revelation is the condemnation of the sinner (Rom 1:18-21)
- Salvation comes only through Christ (John 14:6)
- Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:9-10, 13, 17)

F. Sources of General Revelation

1. Conscience

- Definition: A belief which springs from a person's mind rather than something which is learned.

Romans 2:14-15~ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

- Without knowing the written law of God, people in pagan society generally value and attempt to practice its most basic tenets.
- This is normal for cultures instinctively to value justice, honesty, compassion, and goodness toward others, reflecting the divine law written in the heart.
- Their practice of some good deeds and their aversion to some evil ones demonstrate an innate knowledge of God's law—a knowledge that will actually witness against them on the day of judgment.
- This is confirmed by their consciences, the faculty within human beings that evaluates their actions, along with their thoughts that either accuse or excuse them of sin.
- This is why Paul called such Gentiles a law for themselves (v. 14).

2. Creation

Psalms 19:1~ The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

Romans 1:20~ 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.

2. Special Revelation

- Definition: The provisional revelation found in the Bible and Jesus Christ
- God must disclose Himself specifically to be known by His finite creatures
- Ultimately all knowledge about God is derived from Himself