

Systematic Theology #1: God

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

The word 'theology' derives from two Greek words: 'theos' (God) and 'logos' (study). Theology is the disciplined study of God, his works, and his relation to them in order to love, worship, and obey God in truth.

Systematic Theology is the synthesized, coherent presentation of truth about God and other major themes from the Bible.

- Uses the tools and methods of biblical research to discover the accurate meaning of Scripture.
- Seeks to understand the Bible as a whole, asking the question: What does the whole Bible have to say about a given topic?
- Addresses questions and challenges that people are currently facing.
- Helps us make good choices based on sound biblical teaching.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD'S NATURE

The attributes of God are those permanent, essential qualities of his nature and character which never change or can increase or diminish. God has revealed them to us by his Spirit in the Scriptures.

1. God is transcendent. He is above and beyond his creation and exists independent of it. (Isaiah 55:8-9)
 - God does not depend on the creation for his existence; rather, the creation depends on him for its existence.
 - Because God is transcendent, miracles are possible.
2. God is immanent. He is within his creation. (Acts 17:28)
 - Because God is immanent, he can reveal himself and be understood (in a measure) by finite people.

3. God is spirit. He does not have a physical nature. (John 4:24)
 - Yet God permanently took human nature to himself when the Son became flesh.
 - Because he is pure spirit, all forms of idolatry are forbidden.
4. God is eternal. He always was and always will be. (Psalm 90:2)
5. God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at the same time. (Psalm 139:7-8)
 - Nevertheless, God does not reveal himself or manifest his presence at all times in all places.
 - Because God is omnipresent, he can be worshipped anywhere.
6. God is omnipotent. He possess infinite power. (Jeremiah 32:17; Psalm 147:5)
 - Because God is omnipotent, he can handle any situation imaginable.
7. God is omniscient. He knows all things and possesses perfect wisdom.
 - Because he is omniscient, he is the wisest and best counselor.
8. God is immutable. He never changes. (Malachi 3:6)
 - Because God is immutable, we can trust him.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD'S CHARACTER

1. God is holy. He is set apart from his creation, and is absolutely pure and untouched by evil. (Isaiah 6:3)
 - Because God is holy, we can only relate to him through holiness (Hebrews 12:14)
2. God is righteous. He always does what is right. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

- Because God is righteous, he expects us to be righteous in all our relationships.
3. God is truthful. He cannot lie. (Titus 1:2)
 - Because God only speaks truth, he opposes dishonesty.
 4. God is benevolent. He manifests his love in acts of kindness. (John 3:16)
 - Because God is benevolent, his plans for us are always good. (Jeremiah 29:11)
 5. God is merciful. He has compassion on those in misery and distress.
 6. God is gracious. He expresses goodness toward those who deserve punishment.
 - Because God is merciful and gracious, we can have confidence in the blood of Jesus.

THE TRINITY

Although the word trinity is not found in the Bible, the doctrine is.

1. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there is one God who eternally exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
2. God is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)
 - God is one perfect essence.
3. God is three. (Matthew 28:19; Corinthians 13:14)
 - The essence of God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons are co-equal, co-eternal, and joint partakers of the same majesty.
 - They cannot and do not exist or act independently of one another. They are distinguishable, but indivisible from one another.
4. There are distinct relationships within the Trinity.

- There are different functions within the Trinity, but the three are equal in authority.

ERRORS ABOUT THE TRINITY

There are three basic erroneous understandings of the triune nature of God, all of which are still around today.

1. Tritheism teaches there are three gods related in a loose association.
 - This teaching abandons the oneness of the divine essence with the result that there are three gods rather than three persons.
2. Modalism teaches there is only one God with three modes of existence or three manifestations.
 - Modalism teaches that the one God manifests himself at times as the Father, or the Son, or the Spirit, or sometimes as more than one simultaneously.
3. Arianism teaches only the Father is God, and that the Father created Christ, who is divine, but of a lesser quality than the Father.

THE TRINITY IN THE BIBLE

1. The Old Testament emphasizes the unity of God while containing a few hints to his triune nature.
2. The New Testament reveals the equal divinity and distinctness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - [Y]et for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things... (1 Corinthians 8:6, ESV)
 - But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever..." (Hebrews 1:8, ESV)
 - "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to man but to God." (Acts 5:3-4, ESV)
3. The New Testament points to the reality and doctrine of the Trinity in numerous texts.

- “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19, ESV)
- And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:10-11, ESV)
- For through him (Christ) we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:18, ESV)
- The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14, ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The lesson lists eight attributes of God’s nature. Which is the most difficult for you to grasp? Which do you find to be the most awe-inspiring? Why?
2. What did you learn today about the doctrine of the Trinity? What do you find to be difficult to understand about the Trinity?

HOMEWORK

1. Read the following New Testament passages:
 - Jesus’ baptism and Nazareth preaching (Luke 3:21-22; 4:1-21)
 - Jesus’ Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)
 - Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper (John 14-16)

Write a brief description of the relationship between Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit based on these passages.