

Everyone's A Theologian: Knowledge of God

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Everyone's A Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology / Isaiah 66:1; Psalm 50:9–10

Chapter 9: Knowledge of God

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God has plainly revealed His existence to every creature on earth; all people know that He exists, whether or not they acknowledge it.

- Dr. R.C. Sproul

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In fact, only as we understand the character of God can we understand every other doctrine properly.

- Dr. R.C. Sproul

God Incomprehensible

- Generally the first thing a systematic theologian studies is the incomprehensibility of God.
 - This may seem like a contradictory idea.
 - It makes more sense when we realize that incomprehensible is used as a technical term.
 - It is stating that we are trying to understand the limits of what we can know about God and what lies beyond our ability to comprehend.
- John Calvin summed this idea up with the latin phrase "*finitum non capax infinitum*".
 - The finite cannot grasp/contain the infinite.
 - When *capax* is translated as "grasp" we recognize that we (finite) can never fully understand God (infinite).
 - When *capax* is translated as "contain" we realize that a finite universe cannot contain an infinite God.

God Revealed

- As an infinite being, God must lower His communication to our level.
- This can be thought of as a parent cooing and talking "baby talk" with an infant.
- The communication is primitive but none the less something meaningful is conveyed.

Anthropomorphism

- Anthropomorphic means something is human in form and shape.
- The language in the Bible may be from God but it has been presented in an anthropomorphic form so we can understand it.
- The scripture clearly states that God is not a physical being, but He is often described in physical terms.

Isaiah 66:1 NET

This is what the LORD says:

“The heavens are my throne
and the earth is my footstool.

Where then is the house you will build for me?

Where is the place where I will rest?

Psalms 50:9–10 NET

I do not need to take a bull from your household
or goats from your sheepfolds.

For every wild animal in the forest belongs to me,
as well as the cattle that graze on a thousand hills.

Anthropomorphic Language

- God is described in human terms because it is the only way we can understand Him.
- We must be clear how anthropomorphic language is used so that we understand what is being said, and not misunderstand what is being communicated.
- All language is anthropomorphic because it would be meaningless to humans if it were any other way.

God Described

- There are three ways that finite beings describe an infinite God:
 - *via negationis*: the way of negation
 - *via eminentiae*: the way of eminence
 - *via affirmantionis*: the way of affirmation

Negation

- Negation describes what God is not.
 - **Infinite**: God is not finite.
 - **Immutable**: God is not mutable.
 - **Infallible**: God is not fallible.

Eminence

- Eminence describes a human concept or ability. It is then stated to the ultimate degree.
 - **Omniscient**: God is all knowing.
 - **Omnipotent**: God is all powerful.
 - **Omni-benevolent**: God is all good.

Affirmation

- Affirmation describes specific statements about God.
 - God is **holy**.
 - God is **sovereign**.
 - God is **perfect**.

Three Forms of Speech

- There are three types of speech used to describe an incomprehensible God:
 - Univocal
 - Equivocal
 - Analogical

Univocal Speech

- A descriptive term is applied to two or more things results in the same meaning.
 - “The drive over was good.”
 - “Dinner was good.”
 - Both drive over and the dinner were acceptable.

Equivocal Speech

- A descriptive term is applied to two or more things results in significantly different meaning.
 - “The movie was dry.”
 - “My mouth was dry.”
 - The movie was uninteresting and boring while my mouth lacked moisture.

Analogical Speech

- Descriptive term used to apply a proportion between two things.
 - The man is good.
 - The dog is good.
 - Both the man and the dog are good, that is to say that they are both acceptable. What isn't the same is the criteria. A man must achieve a higher standard than a dog to be considered good.

Speech and Understanding

- Since God is infinite and incomprehensible we must be aware of how we describe Him.
- If we are not careful we could end up with incorrect ideas about how God operates and His nature.
- Understanding technical terms about speech and descriptions isn't critical, it just helps us to get a clearer picture of how theology works.