

Know What You Believe About God, pt. 1

Theological Triage: what importance should we give various doctrines or statements of belief?

- **First tier issues:** those things that make us Christian; these are worth having conflict over.
- **Second tier issues:** those things which divide us along denominational lines
- **Third tier issues:** those things over which we can disagree and maintain fellowship
- We must respect in which tier people place certain issues, but we should strive to avoid making third tier issues into first or second tier issues, and vice versa.

1. Who has the right to tell you what God is really like?

- We must avoid **idolatry** at all costs:
 - God must never be understood to be like us
 - God must never be limited by our understanding
 - God must never be comfortable to us, but ever be dangerous
- Man has no capacity to know God except as God reveals Himself. God could not reveal Himself to a being who had no capacity to know Him.
 - God wants us to know Him, so He reveals Himself
 - God created us to know Him – we can perceive spiritual realities
- We must let God speak for Himself. He takes the initiative to reveal Himself to us, and He will reveal Himself to whom He pleases, how He pleases.
- Three things to pay attention to as you try to know what God is really like:
 - The Bible, the authoritative resource
 - The Church, or your faith tradition – what Christians have come to know about God
 - The Holy Spirit – reveals truth to you, through your own experience. You must always interpret your experience through the lens of scripture and the church.

2. What does it mean that God is “personal?”

- God is personal, He is a person.
- Three things involved in personality
 - Intelligence, including self-consciousness, sentient beings
 - Self-determination – looking ahead, choosing one’s own course
 - Moral consciousness – the ability to distinguish right from wrong

3. One of the ways God has revealed Himself to us is through His natural attributes.

God is **absolute**, He is not dependent on or affected by anything outside Himself; unlimited, perfect. There are several words to unpack this concept, words we use to describe the natural attributes of God.

1. God is **transcendent** and separate from His creation, above and beyond us.
 - He is self-existing, has life in Himself and is the source of all life
 - He is not bound to natural laws.
 - Isaiah 57:15
2. God is **immanent**, and near to His creation
 - Isaiah 57:15
 - His presence and His power pervade all that He has made.
 - He does not stand apart from the universe, as Deists believe.
 - But He is not so immanent that He is indistinguishable from creation.
3. God is **omnipotent**, all powerful.
 - Jeremiah 32:17
 - Luke 1:37
 - There are self-imposed limitations to God’s power, limited by His moral quality. For instance, what are some things that God cannot do?

- His power applies to infinite possibilities, not impossibilities.
- 4. God is **omnipresent**, in all places, all the time.
 - He is not like butter spread thinly over toast.
 - You find all of God, in all places, at all times.
 - Psalm 139:7
- 5. God is **omniscient**, knows everything
 - Our actions and our thoughts
 - Not inference or deduction, but direct knowledge, including all of our free acts. Our acts are not determined for us, but free acts known by God before time began.
 - Psalm 139:2
 - Isaiah 46:9-10, nothing surprises God.
- 6. God is **eternal and timeless**, never had a beginning and will never have an end.
 - Rev. 1:8
- 7. God is **infinite and unlimited**, not limited or confined to the universe He created.
 - No limitations or defects
 - He is independent of finite things and beings.
- 8. God is **unchangeable, does not vary**.
 - James 1:17
 - His love is steadfast and constant and is not subject to the ebb and flow of human love.
 - We are prone to fits of temper, selfishness, we can be volatile or capricious, but God is not like us.
 - God never changes. He seems to be different because we have changed and in doing so have come into a different relationship or understanding of God.

4. List and explain some of God's moral attributes.

- **Holiness** is the sum total of the perfection of God.
 - Holiness is a term for the moral excellence of God and His freedom from all limitations to His moral perfection.
 - Only God is holy, and is the standard of ethical purity by which His creatures are measured. He is completely other and separate from all creation.
 - All He does is good and right, in every act He is free from all imperfection. He cannot even be tempted with evil.
- God is **loving**. His love is divine, a perfect love.
 - Acts in the long-term best interests of those He loves, bringing about what is best for them.
 - His love takes action, and is beyond anything we can understand.
 - Ultimately expressed and personified in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.