

HEAD, HEART, HANDS¹ (1)

Theology: Knowing God Better

A. Introduction

1. Do you know God?

You were made to. You have been saved to.

To know God is to have a relationship with the Father and His Son Jesus in this life and on into the next, and this is to be desired above all things.

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.” (Philippians 3:7-8)

2. Are you growing in your knowledge of God?

Your knowledge of who this God you are in relationship with is.

Your knowledge of what it means to be in relationship with this God.

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” (Ephesians 1:17)

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17-19)

To grow in this area, we need God’s help but also God’s Word.

We will not know God better apart from the Word of God through which He reveals Himself to us in His Son.

“No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18)

3. What does this mean practically?

We need to be reading and studying God’s Word and then organising what it teaches on a particular subject.

This involves regular reading of Scripture both privately and publicly.

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” (Psalm 1:1-2)

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture... Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them.” (1 Timothy 4:13, 15)

This involves regular in-depth study of a particular book of the Bible.

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Acts 17:11)

¹ This series is inspired by and based on Prolegomena in Reformed Systematic Theology (Vol. 1) by Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley

This involves regular crystallising of our thoughts about what God's Word teaches on a theme or topic.

As a local church, we want to help you do this.

The Big Read is our church-wide Bible reading programme which takes you through whole Bible every four years.

The preaching of God's Word on a Sunday morning along with the regular Bible Studies which take place work verse by verse through particular books of the Bible.

On Sunday evenings, we have topical teaching that seeks to bring together what the whole Bible teaches on a specific area.

4. How are we to know God better?

Knowing God is not just something that engages our heads.

It must engage our hearts and our hands too.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30)

We need our minds informed so that we grow in our knowledge and understanding of God.

We need our hearts moved to love God by what we learn of Him and His works.

We need our hands directed by what we most love, which is God – "You are what you love!"

"Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." (Westminster Shorter Catechism)

This engagement of our heads, hearts, and hands, we see in some of Paul's letters.

Head: Romans 1:1-11:32 | Ephesians 1-3

Heart: Romans 11:33-36 | Ephesians 1:3

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen." (Romans 11:36)

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

Hands: Romans 12-16 | Ephesians 4-6

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer bodies as living sacrifices..." (Romans 12:1)

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (Ephesians 4:1)

So, doctrine leads to doxology and devotion.

B. Doctrine: Heads that are informed

1. God wants us to know the truth about Him as revealed in His Word.

"God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

An aspect of faith is knowing and believing certain things about God are true.

"...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12-13)

2. The starting pointing for knowing God with minds that are informed by God's Word.

The danger though, is that this knowledge remains academic.

"The knowledge we especially commend, is not a brain-knowledge, a mere speculation... but an inward, a savoury, an heart knowledge." (Epistle to Reader in Westminster Confession of Faith)

It must move to our hearts and our affections before directing our actions.

"Christianity should not only be known, and understood, and believed, but also felt, and enjoyed, and practically applied... Christianity brought home to men's business and bosoms." (Robert Burns)

C. Doxology: Hearts that are moved

1. What is taught in Scripture about God and His works is to be experienced.

"Taste and see that the LORD is good." (Psalm 34:8)

We especially need an experiential knowledge of three things as the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us: Guilt; Grace; Gratitude.

Heidelberg Catechism (Q2):

Q. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

2. Those who know God feel guilty before Him.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Isaiah 6:5)

"He that hath slight thoughts of sin had never great thoughts of God." (John Owen)

3. Those who know God feel joy because of the grace shown to them in the saving work of Christ.

"He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God." (Psalm 40:2-3)

4. Those who know God feel a desire to express their love for God because of who He is and what He has done.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer bodies as living sacrifices..." (Romans 12:1)

"Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." (Isaac Watts)

D. Devotion: Hands that are directed

1. Our knowledge of God is also to be practical.

It should lead us to ask: "How then shall we live?"

"He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 22:16)

2. Knowing God will lead us to live lives devoted to God.

That is what it means to imitate God.

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children." (Ephesians 5:1)

That is what it means to be holy.

"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:14-16)

What we know about God will shape the way we think and live.

E. What does this mean for us?

1. We need to be theologians.

"Everyone's a Theologian!" (RC Sproul)

"We're all theologians. The question is whether what we know about God is true." (Josh Harris)

You need theology.

"We cannot escape theology. Even the atheist's stout rejection of God is a theological statement." (RC Sproul)

2. What is theology?

Theology is not a word to be scared by.

"Theology is the doctrine of living to God." (William Ames)

"We may define theology as the authoritative knowledge and wisdom revealed in God's Word concerning God so that we may joyfully live unto him through Jesus Christ." (Joel Beeke)

"Christian theology is the study of the divine revelation in the Bible. It has God as its perpetual centrepiece, God's Word as its source, and godliness as its aim." (John MacArthur)

"Theology is what we think about God, which then determines what we think about ourselves and how we live in relation to God and others." (Paul Tautges)

3. Why should we study theology?

John Dick (1764-1833), a Scottish pastor and theologian, gave the following reasons:

i) To ascertain the character of God in its aspect toward us.

ii) To contemplate the display of his attributes in his works and dispensations.

iii) To discover his designs toward man in his original and his present state.

iv) To know this mighty Being, as far as he may be known, [which] is the noblest aim of the human understanding.

v) To learn our duty to him, the means of enjoying his favour, the hopes which we are authorised to entertain, and the wonderful expedient by which our fallen race is restored to purity and happiness.

vi) To love him, the most worthy exercise of our affections.

vii) To serve him, the most honourable and delightful purpose to which we can devote our time and talents.

Ultimately the reason why we should study theology is that God has spoken, and we must hear Him, love Him, obey Him, and teach others of Him.