

Theology Proper: Part I

The Well Institute, J. Scott Bridger, PhD

Why *Study* God?

“We cannot allow ourselves to hold a theology that shrinks God down to a manageable size” (Tripp, *Do You Believe?*, 68)

“The most important thing for your mind to contemplate is his [God’s] existence” (Tripp, *Do You Believe?*, 75)

“We cannot truly know ourselves until we know God” (MH)

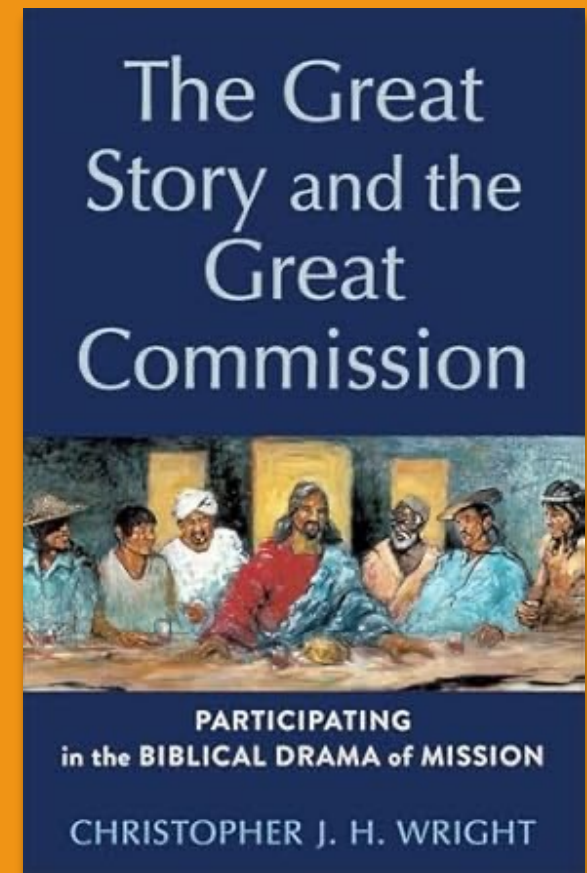
“The most important thing about any one of us is *what we know about God* and *that we know God!*” (MH)

“God is not simply a great sight, the object of speculative curiosity. The revelation of his glory and the whole theological process which legitimately follows from it is holy ground. **We cannot stand as superiors over God or his word. We may not coldly and detachedly analyze and collate the great self-revealing deeds and utterances of Jehovah. We may not theologise without emotion and commitment. The doctrine must thrill and exhilarate. It must humble and cast down...** Theology has lost its way, and, indeed its very soul if it cannot say with John, ‘I fell at his feet as dead’” (Rev 1:17) (Donald Macleod)

“Our theology should always lead to doxology - right knowledge leads to right worship” (MH)

Proper Knowledge of God Requires Reading the Bible Through the Lens of God's Mission

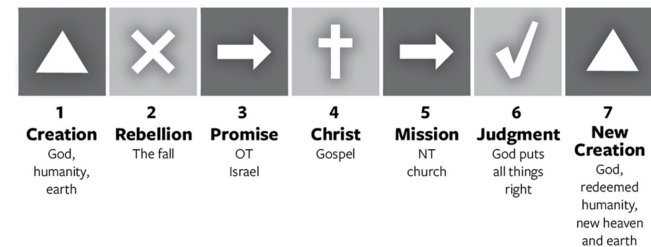
- The Bible as the *Record* of God's Mission
- The Bible as the *Product* of God's Mission
- The Bible as the *Tool* of God's Mission



Knowing the God of Scripture: Inhabiting God's Story

1. Creation ("good" 7xs)
2. Rebellion (collective; shame; dishonoring God; Flood; Babel)
3. Promise (Gen 3:15; 12:3, etc.)
4. Christ (seed of Abraham, David, Messiah, King, Victorious and Living Lord, Savior)
5. Mission (God's mission; fulfillment of promise/prophecy)
6. Judgment (God's holiness, justice)
7. New Creation (our ultimate destination; renewal and reunification of heavens/earth; re-Edenification)

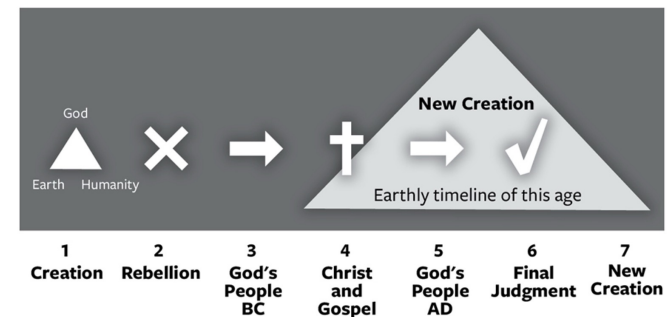
Fig. 2.9. Act 7: New Creation



Knowing the God of Scripture: Inhabiting God's Story

- Reading the Bible as the Story of God's Mission Challenges Us to "Inhabit" the Whole Story of Scripture
- Reading the Bible as the Story of God's Mission Challenges Us to Live Out the Story We Are In
- Reading the Bible as the Story of God's Mission Reshapes Our Worldview
- Reading the Bible as the Story of God's Mission Sends Us Out to Play Our Part in the Mission of God
- Reading the Bible as the Story of God's Mission Governs Our Doctrinal Theology

Fig. 3.1. Living Now in the Light of God's Future



Overview of the Doctrine of God: Its Importance, Its *telos*, Its Practical Implications

The Importance of the Doctrine

(2) God is both **incomprehensible** and yet **knowable**: Isa 55:8; Job 11:7; John 14:7, 17:3

(4) God speaks (self-revealing): Gen 1; John 1; Heb 1:1-3

- **Five ways we are like God**: Spiritually, Morally, Rationally, Creativity/Imagination, Relationally
- **Four relationship(s)**: Love for God, love of creation, love of one another, love of ourselves

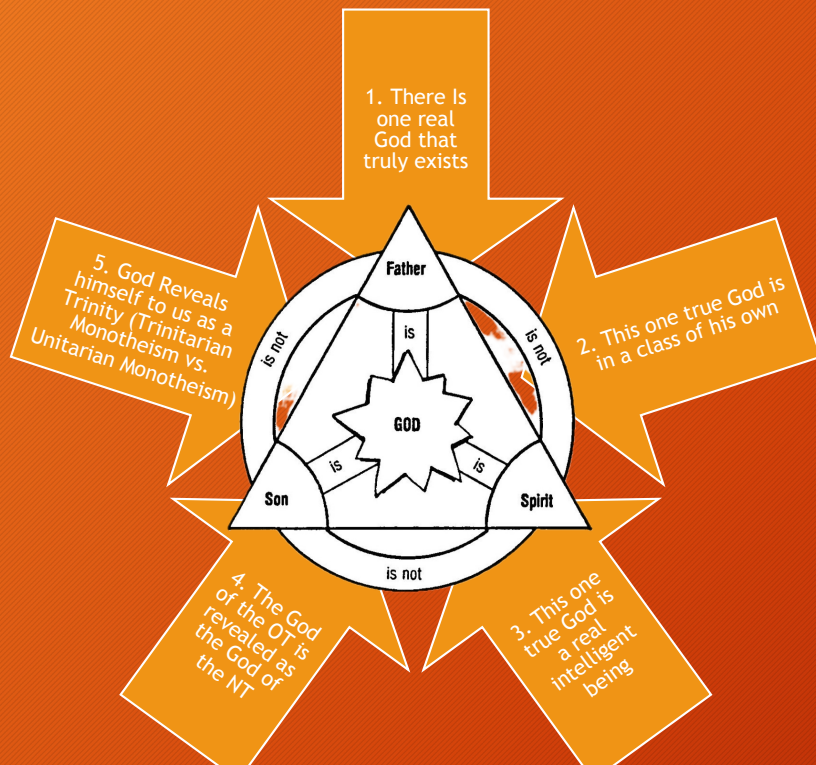
God's Chief End and Man's Chief End

- Catechism (Latin/Greek *katecheo* - to instruct) - *New City* or similar
 - Question 1: "What is our only hope in life and death?" Answer: "That we are not our own but belong to God"
 - Question 4: "How and why did God create us?" Answer: "God created us male and female to glorify him."

The Practical Implications of Theology Proper

- Ex 33:18, 34:6-8 - Knowing God entails delighting in his character
- A biblical view of God necessitates deconstructing the false dichotomy of **sacred / secular**.
- The Gospel is **public truth**; Rom 1 - everyone essentially has some knowledge of God

Biblical & Theological Axioms: What Kind of Being is God?



He is a
spiritual
being

He is a
perfect
being

He is an
infinite
being

He is a
necessary
being

The Attributes of God: What We Mean and What We Don't Mean

- We do not mean that we are attributing something to God.
- Rather, we are recognizing qualities already belonging to God; acknowledging what he is like as revealed in Scripture
 - Perfections - essential characteristics
 - Essential Predication vs Accidental Predication
- The Attributes of God are essential predicates that are necessary to his being; he would not be God without all his attributes
- God's Attributes are different perspectives on his singular essence

Four Traditional Ways or Categories

1. Communicable and Incommunicable
2. Intransitive and Transitive
3. Absolute and Relative
4. Moral and Natural

Other Ways: Original and Derived,
Active and Inactive

The Attributes of God: Divine-Nonmoral Attributes

- Aseity
- Eternality
- Immutability
 - Impassibility
- Omnipresence
- Omnipotence
- Omniscience
- Sovereignty
- Wisdom (Omnisapience)
- Unity
- Simplicity



Divine Sovereignty & Human Agency (Free Will)

Concept	View of Free Will	God's Sovereignty	Key Mechanism for Reconciliation
Compatibilism	Defined as acting according to one's desires/nature (not the ability to choose otherwise).	God exhaustively decrees all events, including human choices.	Redefining 'free will' as choosing willingly; God's sovereignty and human agency are viewed as paradoxical but not contradictory.
Prescience (Simple Foreknowledge)	Libertarian (genuine ability to choose otherwise).	God timelessly knows the future as a settled fact.	God's knowledge is non-causal ; it is knowing what a person will freely do, which does not necessitate their choice.
Middle Knowledge (Molinism)	Libertarian (genuine ability to choose otherwise).	God chooses the actual world based on what free creatures <i>would</i> do.	God knows the outcome via counterfactuals and orders the world's circumstances accordingly.

The Attributes of God: Divine-Moral Attributes

- Holiness
- Righteousness
 - Justice
 - Rectoral justice
 - Egalitarian justice
 - Distributive justice
 - Jealously
 - Wrath
- Goodness
- Truth
- Love
- Grace
- Mercy
- Longsuffering



The Attributes of God: Divine-Moral Attributes

- Missionality: Rooted in the *missio Dei*, God is a missionary God:
 - The Father sends the Son
 - The Father and Son send the Holy Spirit
 - The Triune God sends the Church



Models of Theism: (1) Classical Theism

1. Classical Theism

- i. Actuality
- ii. Immutability
- iii. Impassibility
- iv. Timelessness
- v. Simplicity
- vi. Necessity
- vii. Omniscience
- viii. Omnipotence

- Some think Classical Theism presents a static, transcendent, uninvolved God, something akin to what Deists have espoused.
- The vast majority of evangelicals, however, **critically appropriate** most of the ideas in Classical Theism yet nuance some of them.

Models of Theism: (2) Open Theism

2. Open Theism

- i. Rejection of:
 - Classical Theism
 - Reformed Theology
 - Arminian Theology
 - ii. God is not an impassible, immutable, transcendent dictator
 - iii. God is a relational, loving being who takes risks
 - iv. Actualities vs. Possibilities
 - v. Divine Love
- It has to make the same kind of hermeneutical deductions regarding passages that speak of God having physical features and spatial limitations. The point is if passages that speak of God changing His mind have to be interpreted “literally,” then why wouldn’t one have to say that God also has a body and has to travel from place to place?
 - It has to answer the question as to whether God can be wrong in some of His predictions and expectations.

Models of Theism: (3) Process Theism

3. Process Theism

- i. God is an entity that is embodied by creation (i.e., *panentheism* vs. *pantheism*). God and the world are interdependent and coexist
 - ii. Process, change, and evolution are just as fundamental as substance, permanence, and stability. God is undergoing self-development and growth; he is not immutable, timeless, or perfect
 - iii. Process theologians shift the focus from being/ontological actuality to becoming or ongoing evolution.
 - iv. Evolutionary theory is applied to the metaphysical realm instead of being limited to physical/biological reality
- God is not necessarily a person with a will, mind, etc.
 - To have a nature and yet still be equated with the world raises the question as to whether that nature exists apart from the world (i.e., it raises the problem of the world's eternality).
 - Process theology presumes the tenability of empiricism; however, none of the ontological claims about God are demonstrable, especially if one claims or holds to some notion of biblical authority
 - There are huge gaps between the metaphysical speculation of process theology and God's revelation of himself in Scripture

God's Covenant Name: יהוה

- היה - was
- הוה - is
- יהיה - will be

- Jesus ישוע is LORD

