

The Knowability and Existence of God

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Introduction

Theology is the study of God and His relationship with the creation. In Christianity, theology takes on a specific form and system, creating the basis for studying religious Christian doctrines and matters of divinity.ⁱ It may describe the study of biblical truth or represent the study of God Himself, including His existence, nature, names, attributes, and works. While theological topics have varying and conflicting opinions, the core tenants of Christian theology hold true to every church and denomination.

Theology comes from two Greek words: *theos*, meaning "God," and *logos*, meaning "discourse" or "reason." Thus, theology is the discourse or reasoning about God and His biblical truth that falls into one of three categories:

1. Natural theology – the study of God as revealed in the universe and nature.
2. Biblical theology – the study of God as He has revealed Himself through scripture.
3. Systematic theology – the study of God from nature, philosophical reasoning, and scripture combined and fit into a preconceived ideological system.ⁱⁱ

When interpreting the Bible, Christian theologians use hermeneutics, biblical exegesis, rational analysis, and argument. Not surprisingly, these scholars have differing opinions, most notably after the rise of enlightened human reason in the 17th century and liberalism in the 19th century A.D. Liberal scholars have often taken a more scientific, historical, or socio-political approach to interpreting the Bible. In contrast, Orthodox scholars assume a more literal and fundamental acceptance of scripture.

But here is the question: Whether Orthodox or liberal, can *finite* created beings use philosophical reason or human rationalism to know and understand an *infinite* and unsearchable God?

It is impossible without the revelation, inspiration, and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Paul said, "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16, NKJV).ⁱⁱⁱ And Jesus declared, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand" (Mark 4:11-12).

While we see in scripture that God *will* reason with us, as He declared in Isaiah, we will always remain incapable of doing anything apart from Him.^{iv} Therefore, all theology has apparent limitations. There are aspects of God that we cannot fathom unless He reveals Himself to us. As He says in Isaiah, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

We need to recognize God's transcendence and immanence to discern the knowable from the unsearchable. Transcendence refers to the existence or experience beyond the ordinary or physical realm. In contrast, immanence contradicts transcendence, from the Latin *immanere*, meaning "to dwell in" or "remain" within the creation. God does sustain and dwell within the created realm, but at the same time, He is also separate from it.^v

Given the impossibility of understanding the transcendence of God, our study will focus on His immanence manifest in the creation and revealed through scripture. Paul said: *"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:16). Therefore, through studying scripture and illumination of the Holy Spirit, we can explore every aspect of His revealed nature in this created realm. In other words, if God has shown an element of Himself within this physical realm, in His allowable time, we can know His revealed truth.

God desires to make Himself known to the creation. However, until Jesus returns, we will only know and prophesy in part, meaning that God is not yet fully revealed to us.^{vi} Thus, we read, *"In the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets"* (Revelation 10:7). And what is the mystery? Again, it is the return of Christ and His church, as it is written, *"For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God"* (Romans 8:19).

Jewish mystics believe in the Divine unveiling of the spiritual realm, with God's immanence descending at successively increasing levels of reality. I am convinced that the culmination of God's reality and truth within His creation is Jesus, as He said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6).

We see the first emanation of God in Genesis, where it says, *"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters"* (Genesis 1:2). The Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruach* (רוּחַ) which more accurately translates as "wind." The King James translates the Hebrew *mera-chefet* (מְרַחֶפֶת) as "hovering," but some Jewish versions more appropriately translate the word as "sweeping." This makes sense as the wind does not hover; it blows or sweeps.

Following the creation, we see an emanation of God in the form of a man. We read, *"And they [Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day"* (Genesis 3:8). God's emanations continue throughout scripture in various forms: He spoke to Noah, appeared to Abraham as a man, showed part of Himself to Moses, spoke to all of Israel at Mount Sinai, and revealed Himself to the prophets and men of God through dreams and visions.

Because we know that God is invisible and has no corporeal form, many theologians attribute these emanations to theophanies which are “visible manifestations to humankind of God.”^{vii} Some view these manifestations as pre-incarnate appearances of Christ, the pinnacle of God’s revelation to us in His Son, Jesus (*Yeshua*)—God born in the flesh.^{viii} As we read, “*And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father*” (*John 1:14*). Jesus said, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (*John 14:9*).

Others claim that Christ is the final theophany. But I would argue that He is more than a theophany or a mere appearance of God in a physical form. Christ is God physically habituating as a complete and perfect man within the creation. Therefore, He is called Immanuel, which translates as “God *with us*.” In other words, Christ is not just an appearance of God as we saw in the Old Testament. Jesus is God Himself who has come to dwell with His people.^{ix} God was born in human flesh; fully God, and yet, also fully man.

There are two aspects of creation. One is the physical, seeable, and tangible world; the other is the created spiritual, hidden, and unseen world. We read, “*In the beginning God created the heavens [spiritual] and the earth [natural]*” (*Genesis 1:1*). Paul said, “*There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body*” (*1 Corinthians 15:44*). Every aspect of the physical creation has a spiritual counterpart. As the Lord instructed Moses, “*You shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern which you were shown on the mountain*” (*Exodus 26:30*).^x

However, these two realms are not intended to be separate. On the contrary, the physical and spiritual realms were created to function as one interdependent unit. God’s two manifestations or emanations within the creation—the person of the Holy Spirit and the person of Jesus—are unified in Christ as a perfect incarnation of the Father. Jesus was born in the flesh and was baptized in the Holy Spirit, as we read, “*And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased’*” (*Luke 3:22*).

As Christians, our knowledge of God, for now, is based primarily on what the Bible says about Him. This is called “faith”—believing in what we have not seen.^{xi} While the heavens declare the glory of God and His handiwork (natural theology), we would not know about the deliverance from sin and eternal life in Christ without God’s written word (Biblical theology).^{xii} And without the discourse or reasoning about God and His biblical truth (systematic theology), we would not be able to formulate an orderly, rational, and coherent account of the doctrines of our Christian faith. Therefore, all theology that fundamentally expounds our understanding of God, despite its limitations, is essential because God is our highest good and the source and sustenance of all life.^{xiii}

The Knowability of God

God is the infinite one, and He is incomprehensible; as we read, *"Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7)*. Paul said, *"Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (Romans 11:33)*.

And yet, God is knowable and has made Himself known through His Son, Jesus. As we read, *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person..." (Hebrews 1:1-3)*.

John said: *"We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20)*. And Jesus prayed, *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3)*.

We begin with the realization that there is only *one* God, *monotheism*, stemming from the word *theism*, the belief in the existence of a supreme being or deity that both preserves and sovereignly controls all He created.^{xiv}

On one end of the theological spectrum is *deism*, the belief in a divine creator who does *not* intervene or interfere with His creation. Well-known deists include Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Abraham Lincoln. On the other end is *pantheism*, the belief that the universe is a manifestation of God and that God and the universe are the same. Well-known pantheists include Ludwig van Beethoven, Nikola Tesla, Albert Einstein, and Ansel Adams.

Unfortunately, both these views are unbiblical. God is infinite, transcendent, and separate from His creation.^{xv} And yet, He is also immanently and intimately connected with it.^{xvi} God is incomprehensible, declaring: *"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4)*. But He is also personally knowable, as we read, *"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30)*.

Because we were created in the image of God, who is Spirit, it is inconceivable and incomprehensible for us to completely know God unless He has revealed Himself in a physical and spiritual form comparable to ours. In other words, we cannot elevate ourselves to know the Divine, yet God *has* lowered Himself to make Himself known to the created. Therefore, regarding the Advent of Christ, we read, *"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13)*; *"For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:5)*.^{xvii}

We can and must know God, and to know God, we must know Christ through scripture and, equally as necessary, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Knowing God is essential for our salvation, but it is also required for our fellowship with God, our service to Him,

and our spiritual growth and maturity. While Christ is not presently visible to the natural world, He is seated and exalted at the right hand of the Father.^{xviii}

One day soon, at the second Advent, we shall be like Him and see Him as He is. As it is written, *"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John 3:2). The Lord declared that even the whole earth would know Him, *"For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, As the waters cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2:14).

The Existence of God

God is Spirit, and no one has seen Him at any time.^{xix} The Apostle John affirmed this by saying: *"Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father"* (John 6:46). And yet, God still requires that we believe that He exists, as we read, *"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6). And so it is by faith, not by sight, that we are to believe in God. Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John 20:29).

We are told that *"God has dealt to each one a measure of faith"* (Romans 12:3). He has given each person this gift and the ability to know He exists. Even *"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1). The creation declares God's righteousness. In other words, the glory of the heavens and earth affirms that God is both judge and King over all He has made. Thus, we read, *"Let the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is Judge"* (Psalm 50:6).

We know that Jesus is God and that He is both judge and King; this is not a contradiction. The Father has turned all authority in heaven and earth to the Son, and Son is the glory of God the Father revealed to the creation.^{xx} The Psalmist declares: *"The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples see His glory"* (Psalm 97:6). And John affirmed by saying, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14).

Therefore, Paul says that *"Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened"* (Romans 1:20-21). And so, we read, *"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good"* (Psalm 14:1).^{xxi}

As Christians, our belief in God is not blind nor irrational. Through the creation, we are supported with overwhelming evidence that our faith is genuine and God is the all-powerful, wise, and benevolent Creator. While we see the consequences and destructiveness of sin in the

world, including the suffering and pain of death, without the Bible, we are without any knowledge and assurance of God as our redeemer.^{xxii} While we acknowledge God's existence in the natural world, no person can know God's saving-grace through Christ without the Bible. We require Biblical theology. Hence, the prophet declared, *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).*

The Old Testament foreshadowed God's deliverance from the pit of corruption. Yet our assurance of eternal life is only found in the words of Jesus and the testimonies of those who witnessed His resurrection.^{xxiii} Hence Paul declared, *"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32); "The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints" (Colossians 1:26).* Jesus said, *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).*

The mystery, now made known, is the Gospel—the good news of Christ and His salvation, shared with every person through the church. As we read, *"How shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (Romans 10:15).*

It is only in Christ that *"we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself" (Ephesians 1:7-9).*

And so, we have the natural realm and scripture to prove that God exists and that Jesus is the Christ, yet even these are insufficient. How many have gazed at the heavens and read the entirety of scripture and still not believed? Therefore, we are without excuse, as Paul said, *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).*

Only the Holy Spirit can convict us of sin and our need for a Savior, and only He can illuminate our darkened hearts and direct us to Christ, the one who redeems us from sin and death. Thus, Jesus responded to Peter's confession, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).*

And through the natural world, the Holy Spirit has equipped and empowered the believer to more than declare the Gospel. We demonstrate it as it says, *"Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel From the Lord of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion" (Isaiah 8:18).* And Paul said, *"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:22).*

Jesus spoke concerning the Day of Pentecost, saying: *"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and*

Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This power would be for witnessing the Gospel to the ends of the earth and demonstrating it through love and good works, healings and miracles, signs, and wonders, as we read, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Therefore, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

God continues to reveal Himself and make Himself known through the creation, His written word, and now in these last days, His church. And there is the argument for God's existence from nature and science, reason, history, and the human soul. From science and nature, we find that every plant and creature is intelligently designed, and the whole of nature itself is in perfect balance. We also see that the earth is unstable, wobbling on its axis, and plagued by earthquakes, volcanoes, drought, floods, and other extreme weather events. These reveal that our world is amiss and suggest that something must be fixed.

This paradox of natural balance and instability leads us to argue God's existence from reason. We discover that the universe is expanding into infinite nothingness, stars are burning out and dying, and black holes are consuming entire galaxies. Spectrographic studies show that all the stars and planets move away from each other, indicating that the universe has a beginning and an end. Scientists also grapple with the universe's origins, theorizing that everything began with a single explosion, the "big bang." Yet they fail to explain how something can appear out of nothing (Latin *ex nihilo*). From nothing, nothing comes unless someone willed for it to exist and physically created it.

Human beings from every part of the world, past and present, are incurably religious in their belief in a higher supreme being. Throughout history, people have hoped in Divine providence to control every inspired prophecy and establish a meaningful need and purpose for our existence that extends beyond our current, hopeless finite condition. We read that *"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).*

Another argument for God's existence is with Israel's indestructibility throughout the ages and, most significantly, her rebirth in 1948. No other nation in history has ever emerged from the ashes of destruction. In the face of absolute hatred and persecution, the tenacious gripping of the Jewish people to their Bible, monotheistic beliefs, and customs and traditions, including circumcision, is borderline irrational.

Lastly, we see the evidence of God's existence in the human soul. No other creature on earth has anywhere near the equivalent of our intellectual and emotional capacity. And if we are made in God's image, we also bear His moral attributes. Our desire to worship the Divine is further evidence that we were not only made in God's image but also created to live in intimacy with Him.

Yes, humanity is capable of the most incomprehensible evil. Still, the overwhelming good we see in the world speaks volumes about God's existence and His image, which we carry in our souls.

And the fact that we have the freedom to choose what is right over evil means that we are also morally accountable for our actions, and only a personal God will hold us responsible for our conduct.

Paul spoke to this sense of duty and responsibility; in humanity's possession of conscience by saying: *"Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)"* (Romans 2:15). Our ability to rationalize, reason, create, innovate, love, and forgive all points to a loving God filled with endless mercy and compassion and one who is wise beyond our comprehension. Our appreciation for beauty, art, and music defies any argument for evolution and the theory of natural selection, as not one of these is required for our survival.

In all these arguments, we find the world continuously and forever searching for a Savior, one who will come with the Divine providence of a supreme Deity, with a fate and destiny of the gods to enter the timeline of human history and fix our incurable ills. We know and believe from the Bible, the inspired word of God, and His written message to humanity that this someone is Jesus Christ, the judge, King, and Savior of the entire world. No other book has ever holistically incorporated moral and spiritual teachings infused with the power to heal the deepest and most sinful conditions of the human soul. God has provided the evidence to establish beyond any reasonable doubt that He indeed does exist, and more importantly, He is intimately knowable.^{xxiv}

Amen!

ⁱ Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language. S.V. "theology."

ⁱⁱ Duffield, Guy P. and Van Cleave, Nathaniel M. *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*. Foursquare Media. 1910.

ⁱⁱⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

^{iv} Isaiah 1:18. John 15:5.

^v Immanence, Philosophy and Theology. Encyclopedia Britannica.

^{vi} 1 Corinthians 13:9.

^{vii} Oxford Dictionary. John 1:18, 6:46. Hebrews 11:3.

^{viii} Colossians 1:15.

^{ix} Matthew 1:23. Revelation 21:3.

^x Exodus 25:9, 25:40.

^{xi} John 20:29.

^{xii} Psalm 19:1.

^{xiii} Acts 17:26-28. John 1:4.

^{xiv} Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

^{xv} Job 11:7. Romans 11:33. Isaiah 40:18 & 25, Psalm 36:6.

^{xvi} Hebrews 1:1-3. John 1:18, 17:3. 1 John 5:20. 1 Corinthians 13:12. Ephesians 1:17. Philippians 3:10. Colossians 1:10. Romans 1:19-23, 28. 2 Peter 1:2-3.

^{xvii} John 6:33 & 38, 6:41-42, 50-15 & 58.

^{xviii} Acts 2:33.

^{xix} John 1:18, 4:24.

^{xx} Matthew 28:18.

^{xxi} Psalm 53:1.

^{xxii} Genesis 12:1-3. Isaiah 52:10-53:12.

^{xxiii} Psalm 16:10. Isaiah 38:17.

^{xxiv} 2 Timothy 3:16-17. 2 Peter 1:20-21. 1 Corinthians 2:12-13. Jeremiah 1:1-13.