

The God of Scripture

We cannot think of knowledge of God as mere objective study, as another course we take in school, as if we are investigating a object like a chemical reaction. Knowledge of God is loving God; it is not merely the development of propositional systematics, although it involves ordering the truth propositions of Scripture as they reveal the person and work of Christ. Knowledge of God requires the yielded mind, but it is much, much more. To know God is to love God with the totality of our being. Loving God manifests itself in adoration, trust, obedience, reverential fear, and the extension His grace and mercy to others, without end, seventy times seven. We experience the Father's unconditional love for us as we participate in the circle of holy love that interpenetrates the Trinity, as we are brought into union with that circle through the torn veil of Christ's mediating humanity by the Holy Spirit. The ground of the knowledge of God is not abstract, philosophical, or decretal. The aim of that knowledge is not merely me as the target. The knowledge of God is personal, dynamic, intimate, and outgoing. It is this knowledge that imparts meaning and direction to everything else in life, including ourselves and our service to others, everything else we study, including chemical reactions.

James Nickel

... all the characteristics of God are expressions of this core nature of relationship and love. The holiness of God, for example, is an expression of the utter uniqueness, the singularity of the trinitarian love. There is nothing like it in the universe. It is in a class by itself, set apart, incomparable. Its beauty, its goodness, its joy is one of a kind. The righteousness of God speaks not of the conformity of the Father, Son, and Spirit to a law of some sort that stands above them, but of the sheer rightness of their relationship. Likewise, the wrath of God is not the opposite of love, as if the two were vying for control in God's relationship with humanity. The love of the Father, Son, and Spirit does not play second fiddle to divine anger. ... Wrath is the love of the triune God in passionate action, saying "No!" It is love's fiery opposition to our destruction. Likewise, the judgment of God is not the divine "dark side" finally having its say. To judge is to discern, to see into a matter and understand what is wrong in order to make it right and whole. Thus, as Pope Benedict said, "The judgment of God is hope, both because it is justice and because it is grace."

Kruger, C. Baxter (2012-10-02). *The Shack Revisited: There Is More Going On Here than You Ever Dared to Dream* (p. 128). FaithWords. Kindle Edition.

A dualist approach to the doctrine of God is a particular characteristic of both the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. By dualism, I mean that the first "course" in the study of theology is usually the idea of the one essence of God, including proofs of His existence and certain attributes that are deemed essential based upon a previous commitment to a specific theological system. Following this is an account, sometimes a very brief one, of the three Persons in God, without any conscious attempt to integrate the relationship between the Triune God and what was said about God before. The effect of doing this is to separate "God" from "God", to offer a doctrine of God behind the back of who He has revealed Himself to be in Jesus. Hence, the Biblical way into the knowledge of God is to start with the self-revelation of Jesus; He is the One who reveals the Father and He is the One who sends the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. The Father can only be known through Jesus Christ as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Without the revelation of Jesus as the starting point, we are in danger of creating a disjoint God, a God who is not directly related to His redeeming acts in history, i.e., His humble and gracious act of becoming a servant whereby He became one with us and gave Himself freely for us, indeed, to reconcile the world to Himself.

James Nickel, "Dualism and the Study of the Doctrine of God: A Brief Summary of the Trinitarian Theology of Thomas F. Torrance"

It is essential that we embrace a Trinitarian understanding of the holiness of God. Holy means "set apart." By this definition, we naturally tend to think of God being set apart from creation or, in terms of

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legality, from sin. But, God was holy before creation, before sin. Hence, there is a reality in the Godhead, apart from creation and apart from sin, that is Holy. God has never been alone or solitary. The God who is Holy is love and love is impossible unless there is a lover and a beloved. The holy reality of the Godhead is based upon a dance of interpersonal relationship. From eternity past to eternity future, each person of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is set apart to each other in the mutual delight and wonder of joyful fullness, in an intimate harmony, health, wholeness, and rightness that is describable, if human words can elucidate such quintessence, as the beauty of holiness.

James Nickel

If God Himself has condescended out of sheer love at infinite cost to Himself to come among us in our weakness and misery in order to make our cause His very own, and bring His divine serenity to bear upon our suffering, then ... prayer is something very real, for it is directed in the name of His beloved Son to the Father in the light of His immense compassion, His unlimited freedom, the infinite outreach of His grace, and His boundless capacity for care in healing and redemptive provision for us in life and death."

Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*, p. 254

Christianity's faith in divine providence is simply the converse of faith in redemption; the two are so indissolubly and organically one, that if either be amputated the other slowly bleeds to death. The same Father who saves the world at the cost of Jesus is he who omnipotently guides the world, and the single lives within the world, to a blessed end. Providence is correlative to the Cross.

H. R. Mackintosh, *The Originality of the Christian Message* (1920), p. 70

A child kicks its legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, Do it again; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough ... It is possible that God says every morning, Do it again, to the sun; and every evening, Do it again, to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike: it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.

G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

But so many Christians are like deaf people at a concert. They study the programme carefully, believe every statement made in it, speak respectfully of the quality of the music, but only really hear a phrase now and again. So they have no notion at all of the mighty symphony which fills the universe, to which our lives are destined to make their tiny contribution, and which is the self-expression of the Eternal God.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941)

D. A. Carson has written a book with a somewhat strange title: *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Crossway, 1999). While trying to be constructive in his analysis, his discourse unfolds the gymnastics one must perform given Calvinistic presuppositions. The Bible reveals the amazing reality God's triune nature, the interpenetrating dance of love freely shared by the three persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (I John 4:8). Carson should be unfolding the nature of God's love and the purposes of His love for all humanity, created and redeemed by the Father's beloved Son (Colossians 1:15-17; John 3:16-18; II Corinthians 5:17-21). In so doing, he would be forced to change his title: *The Wonderful Doctrine of the Love of God*.

James Nickel

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The Bible is supremely a manual of worship, but too often it has been treated, particularly in Protestantism, as a manual of ethics, of moral values, of religious ideas, or even of sound doctrine. When we see that the worship and mission of the church are the gift of participating through the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father and the Son's mission from the Father to the world, that the unique center of the Bible is Jesus Christ, "the apostle and high priest whom we confess" (Heb. 3:1), then the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, the atonement, the ministry of the Spirit, Church and sacraments our understanding of the kingdom, our anthropology and eschatology, all unfold from that center. If out of the confessional (kerygmatic) statements of the Bible come doxological statements, Christian dogmatics unfolds from reflection on doxology. True theology is done in the presence of God in the midst of the worshiping community. The "two horizons" of the Bible and our contemporary church life fuse in worship, as at the Lord's Table, when we seek together in a life of communion to comprehend with the saint of all ages the triune love of God in Christ.

James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, pp. 9-10

Countless believers have had their vision of God restored by meditating on Isaiah 40-45, where God's transcendence, sovereignty, and personality pulsate through the text.

D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, p. 230

Let us consider the God who calls us to worship Him either privately or corporately.

- When we pronounce the word "God" we must see to it that our minds are flooded with a wondrous sense of the interpenetrating, self-giving love between the eternal Three in One and One in Three - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of the infinitude of this love, the majesty of this love, the ineffable exaltation of this love, the beauty and flame, the perfect holiness of this love, the rightness of this love, and the affluent and extravagant goodness of this love.
- This is the Lord God Almighty, of whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, to which the earth, although less than a small bit of dust on a balance beam and its nations a mere drop in a bucket, is the object of the purpose of His benevolent design.
- Although He has no need of anything, nor can His unsullied blessedness be in any way affected, whether by way of increase or decrease, by any act of the creatures of His hands, He has chosen, in His good pleasure, to draw us into the circle of His delight and into the concern of His passion.
- The ages past are but as yesterday in His sight.
- The vast, seemingly infinite outreaches of space, to which the lenses of the Hubble Space telescope ingather only the tip of the iceberg, are but a speck on the horizon of His contemplation.
- His ways and thoughts are above our diminutive, insignificant perceptions as the highest point in the heavens is above the earth.
- Regal in the unapproachable light of His glory, we have been graced to see the reflection of His goodness in the face of His Son.
- His covenant love is the resistless law of all His created works.
- The Sun, Moon, planets, and the innumerable stars harmonize their every motion to His eternal dance.
- Appareled in majesty and girded with strength, righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.
- He sits in the heavens and what has pleased Him, He has done.
- It is this God, a God of whom to say, in the light of the above, that He is Lord of all the earth is to say so little that it is to say nothing at all; it is this God who has, according to the kind intention of His will, set His redeeming love upon us, having predestined us to the adoption of sons through Je-

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sus Christ, to include us in the circle of His fellowship, according to the good pleasure of His gracious disposition.

- It is this God who so loved the world, a world resolved in consummate rebellion against Him, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but experience life eternal, to know the Father, the one, true God through the redeemer Jesus Christ.
- It is this God through whom His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, justice and mercy have kissed on Calvary's Cross.
- And it is to this God that His Holy Spirit bids us to come; we come knowing that we are dead, lost, least, and last; in all our imperfections, we come; we come resting confidently and contritely on Jesus Christ, the One who redeemed us has brought us into the loving embrace of His Father.
- It is to this Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that we come in humble and joyful adoration.
- It is to this Triune God, the God who is love, that we bow the knee.

James Nickel

Holiness is not an inflexible, “stainless steel” rightness. Holiness is the jubilation of every beautiful facet of who God is based on the truth that He has revealed to us in Scripture and through the Lord Jesus Christ (even if this disclosure is only an infinitesimal subset). Holiness is our God-graced participation with the Living God dancing, the Living God singing, the Living God light, the Living God iridescent.

James Nickel

Unless we are truly awestruck (indeed, dumbfounded both morally and intellectually) by the revelation of the Living God of Scripture, we should not bandy words such as “our God is an awesome God.”

James Nickel

How many of us associate God with laughter? How many of us see Genesis 1 in the context of God, the only independent One, the One who needs nothing, making the wonders of the world with joy unspeakable (i.e., playing joyfully at His work)? How many of us see laughter in the eyes of Jesus and a warm smile on His face in many of the Gospel incidents? A merry heart doeth good like medicine ...

James Nickel

Like a musician who has tuned his lyre and, by an artistic blending of low, high and medium tones, produces a single melody, so the wisdom of God, holding the universe, adapting things heavenly to things earthly, and earthly things to heavenly, harmonizes them all and leads them by His will to make one world order in beauty and harmony.

Athanasius (ca. 293-373), *Contra Gentiles*

If we have not been afraid of God in a right, beautiful sense (in terms of His transcendent wonder), then we have not truly known God in the rhythmic roar of His depths (Psalm 29).

James Nickel

We have not understood God's eternal purpose rightly if we conclude that we, our happiness, or even our glorification, is its climax or center. The ultimate end of God's purposes on earth (in time and in eternity) is the unqualified and resolute glorification of God Himself. He, the Alpha and Omega, is the Center and Climax. We, made in God's image, can only find purpose in that purpose.

James Nickel

I would claim that it [the heart of my theology] is deeply Nicene and doxological (theology and worship going inextricably together), with its immediate focus on Jesus Christ as Mediator, and its ultimate focus on the Holy Trinity.

Thomas F. Torrance (1913-2007), from an interview by R. D. Kernohan

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I was reading some old notes (from the 1970s) about God's omniscience. The author said, to summarize 12 pages of explanation, "Since I cannot get my brain around the idea of God's total omniscience, then God must not be totally omniscient." Do we therefore limit God by the limitation of our minds? Isaiah 55:8-9 is God's answer.

James Nickel

Two days from now it will seem that the foreknowledge of God was involved in every action taken by us today.

Sherwood Elliot Wirt, *Getting into Print*, p. 18

How to avoid God—It is very easy; just follow these simple guidelines:

1. Avoid silence.
2. Avoid solitude.
3. Avoid any train of thought that leads off the beaten track.
4. Concentrate on money, sex, status, health, and your own complaints and grievances.
5. Keep the radio/TV on.
6. Live in a crowd.
7. Use plenty of tranquilizers like alcohol and pills.
8. If you must read books, select them very carefully. Be safe; stick to the newspapers; you will find the ad's helpful, especially those with a sexy or snobbish appeal.

C. S. Lewis

What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1

Live with eternity's values in view.

Motto of Bethany Missionary Church, Bloomington, Minnesota

To know God and to make Him known.

Motto of Youth With A Mission (YWAM)

Worship is transcendent wonder.

Thomas Carlyle

The view we entertain of God will determine our view of the world.

Christoph Ernst Luthardt

Fellowship with God is delightful. He communes with us in easy, uninhibited fellowship that is restful and healing to the soul. He is not sensitive nor selfish nor temperamental. He is faithful. He is not hard to please, but He may be hard to satisfy. He is quick to mark every simple effort to please Him. He overlooks our imperfections when He knows we meant to do His will. He loves us for ourselves. God is the sum of all patience and the essence of kindly good will. We please Him most, not by our self-efforts or good works, but by throwing ourselves helplessly into His arms with all our imperfections and believing that He understands everything and loves us still.

A. W. Tozer

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I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking, "My Name is I am." He paused. I waited. He continued, "When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I was. When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I will be. When you live in this moment, it is not hard. I am there. My name is I am.

Helen Mallicoat

My God is the infinite, eternal, triune, personal God who is eternally young. He is eternal joy. He is the center of total peace, and He loves me, He likes me, He delights over me, and has come to me to dance and "dance of the universe" with me through life in Jesus Christ.

Malcolm Smith

How completely satisfying to turn from our limitations to a God who has none. Eternal years lie in His heart. For Him time does not pass, it remains; and those who are in Christ share with Him all the riches of limitless time and endless years. God never hurries. There are no deadlines against which He must work. Only to know this is to quiet our spirits and relax our nerves. For those out of Christ, time is a devouring beast. The Christian man possesses God's own life and shares His infinitude with him. In God there is life enough for all and time enough to enjoy it. His love is boundless.

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Too late came I to love Thee, O Thou Beauty both so ancient and so fresh....

Augustine

We turn to God when our foundations are shaking, only to learn that it is God who is shaking them.

Charles West

Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about man's search for God. For me, they might as well talk about the mouse's search for a cat.

C. S. Lewis

The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.

G. K. Chesterton.

The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are not worthy of Him.

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

The devil is a better theologian than any of us and is a devil still.

A. W. Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God*

The Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity. With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence.

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Jesus issued an invitation, but made clear His demands. He supplied needs, but required sacrifice. He made promises, but emphasized costs. He was as offensive as He was appealing. No one who chose to follow Him could have done so with eyes closed.

Os Guinness

To know God is at once the easiest and the most difficult thing in the world. It is easy because the knowledge is not won by hard mental toil, but is something freely given. As sunlight falls on the open

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field, so the knowledge of the holy God is a free gift to men who are open to receive it. But this knowledge is difficult because there are conditions to be met and the obstinate nature of fallen man does not take kindly to them.

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God.

A. W. Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God*

Oh God, Thou hast made us for thyself, and ours hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.

Augustine