

Session 4: Theology Proper or the Theology of God, Part 3

Theology Proper Defined

Theology Proper is the study of the Triune God Himself. Theology Proper focuses specifically on the being, attributes and works of God, especially in the purposes of creation.

Providence

God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes.

Elements of divine providence:

1. Preservation: God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them. (Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:17, Acts 17:28)
2. Concurrence: God cooperates with (*“coordinates” would seem to be a better word here*) created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do. (Job 38, Daniel 4:34-35, Psalm 139)
3. Government: God has a purpose in all that He does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.
 - a. Scriptural evidence:
 - b. Distinctions concerning the will of God:
 - i. moral will (revealed will), the ten commandments, the sermon on the Mount
 - ii. providential will (secret will), (Acts 2:23, Acts 17:25-26)
4. Theodicy: Theories on the concurrence of the existence of the God of providence and the existence of evil
5. The Decrees of God
6. The Importance of Our Human Actions: Human responsibility, Human impact
7. Practical Application
 - a. Trust God
 - b. Be thankful for all the good that happens
 - c. There is no such thing as good or bad “luck”
8. The Debate Over the Sovereignty of God and the Salvation of People

- a. Originally debated in 400 AD between Pelagius and Augustine
- b. Pelagius: no such thing as original sin, all people are like Adam before the fall, people can and do live perfectly sinless lives, people are essentially good and so is the world at large, salvation through Christ was only to help those who struggle to live the life of perfection that God has for them
- c. Augustine: all people are sinners and in desperate need of salvation, apart from Christ salvation is impossible, God must do a miraculous work in each person for them to come into a relationship with Him

9. Arminianism versus Calvinism

A. Five-points of Arminianism (issued in early 1600s)

1. Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him, nor
2. Is he ever so completely controlled by God that he cannot reject it
3. God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by His foreseeing that they will of their own accord believe
4. Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone; what it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe
5. It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost

B. Five-points of Calvinism (issued at The Synod of Dort in 1618 in response to the above)

1. Fallen man in his natural state lacks all power to believe the gospel, just as he lacks all power to believe the law, despite all external inducements that may be extended to him
2. God's election is a free, sovereign, unconditional choice of sinners, as sinners, to be redeemed by Christ, given faith and brought to glory
3. The redeeming work of Christ had as its end and goal the salvation of the elect
4. The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to faith never fails to achieve its object
5. Believers are kept in faith and grace by the unconquerable power of God till they come to glory

A. Arguments in favor of Arminians

1. The verses often cited by Calvinist are specific and extraordinary events and not the ordinary course of daily life
2. The Calvinist view wrongly makes God responsible for sin.
3. Choices caused by God cannot be real choices.
4. The Arminian view encourages responsible Christian living, while the Calvinistic view encourages dangerous fatalism.

B. Arguments in favor of Calvinism

1. There are verses that, in fact, describe the sovereignty of God in salvation.

2. Even if God is passive on the issue of sin, Arminians still believe He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent so if sin came into the world, either directly or passively, God is still responsible at some level for sin's existence. Both groups must grapple with the holiness and sovereignty of God and the sinfulness of humanity that He allows.
 3. It is possible in the complexity of an eternal God to be simultaneously sovereign and allow for real choices. God is not limited by human limitations of time, space, knowledge and dependence.
 4. Arminianism is anthropocentric in that it places the focus of history, salvation, eternity, and the church on humanity and not on God.
- C. Suggestions for the path forward
1. Be humble before God and others for none of us knows enough to be arrogant about these matters.
 2. Be kind to one another and patient with one another for we are part of one body and the unity of the church matters greatly to the cause of Christ.
 3. Our view on Calvinism or Arminianism does not determine someone's eternal destiny.
 4. Keep learning and thinking about the whole of the Bible, not just one or two issues within the Bible, especially as to the scripture and its challenge to what we think, say, and do every day of our lives.

Miracles and Prayer

“A miracle is a less common kind of God's activity in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.” (Grudem)

Other definitions, “an exception to a natural law” or “God acting contrary to the laws of nature.” Or “an event impossible to explain by natural causes.”

Biblical terms used for a miracle: sign, wonder, might work

“Christians see answers to prayer every day, and we should not water down our definition of miracle so much that every answer to prayer is called a miracle.” (Grudem)

The purposes of Miracles:

1. To authenticate the Gospel (the resurrection and ascension, woman at the well, demon possessed man at the Decapolis)
2. To bear witness to the kingdom of God (Jesus reading from Isaiah, Matthew 12:28)
3. To help those in need (feeding of the 5,000, raising of the widow's only son)
4. To remove hindrances to people's ministries (Peter's mother-in-law, Epaphroditus)
5. To bring glory to God (the man born blind, healing of the paralyzed man)

6. To authenticate apostolic authority (2 Corinthians 11-12)

There are false miracles used by those opposing God or by those false teachers seeking to profit from God.

Should Christians ask for or seek miracles today? Acts 4, Acts 9 and James 5:14 are examples where the church did seek God's intervention or miraculous work. Be cautious with assertions of miracles and be highly skeptical by any claims to someone as "miracle worker."

"Prayer is not made so that God can find out what we need... God wants us to pray because prayer expresses our trust in God and is a means whereby our trust in him can increase." (Grudem)

e Effectiveness of Prayer

1. Prayer changes the way God acts.
2. Prayer is effective because of the Mediatorial work of Christ
3. Prayer is effective when it brings honor to the name of Jesus Christ
4. Prayer is effective when aided by the Holy Spirit
5. Prayer to the Father through the Son by the power of the Spirit

Hindrances to Prayer

1. Not praying according to God's will
2. Not praying with faith
3. Disobedience
4. Unconfessed sin
5. Unforgiveness toward others
6. Pride
7. Faithlessness
8. Inauthentic
9. Impatience
10. Not praying with the help of other believers

Aspects of Prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication