

Doctrine of God

Part 3 – Knowing God by Name

Exodus 3

Exodus 3:9–12:

[9] And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. [10] Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” [11] But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” [12] He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” (vv. 9-12)



- Moses' dilemma was how could he go before the most powerful man in the world – a man whose own people see him as a god – and tell him to release thousands and thousands of slaves? But God promises in verse 12: “I will be with you.”
- Try to understand how absurd that must have sounded to Moses. “You want me to go before the Pharaoh – the man viewed as god on earth – the man whose people claim can take away and give life by his own miraculous power? You want me to go give him orders?”
- But before going to Pharaoh, Moses understands that he must first go to his own people. The dilemma is that they do not know Moses. For forty years he was away working in anonymity for his father-in-law. So before Moses goes to Pharaoh and does the unthinkable, he's going to have to go first to his own people who do not know him and almost certainly will not trust him. Moses knows that this action could bring down Pharaoh's vindictiveness upon their heads. So he asks the pressing question in verse 13:

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”

- Moses understands that he will have to tell his people who has authorized him to do this. And so God answers him: Vv. 14-17:

[14] God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” [15] God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. [16] Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, [17] and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’

- It is crucial to recognize that God gives Moses two names. These two names set God apart from all the other mythical gods of the Egyptians. In these two names the people will know how God is unlike the gods that they will encounter as they journey among the Canaanites. The two names God reveals to Moses set the stage for knowing God not only as deep mystery but also as the One who moves toward us and will eventually save us.

1. “I Am Who I Am”

- The Hebrew “to be” verb is the first name God proclaims to Moses. It can actually be understood in three different ways:
I Have Been Who I Have Been
I Will Be Who I Will Be
I Am Who I Am
- When we talk about someone we do so in reference to other people. We compare and contrast. If I were in a crowded place attempting to identify my brother on the other side of the room I would do so in part by comparing him in relation to me. I would compare his hair, his height, his age in comparison to my own. This one of the most common ways that we speak about others – through intricate webs of comparison and contrast. “That’s my wife over there. She’s talking to Kathy over by the green sofa next to the large window. She’s the one with dark hair and the black dress.” Indeed it is often by way of comparison that we first get to know other people.
- But it is precisely what is shut down by the way in which God names himself to Moses. In naming himself in such a strange way, God reveals himself to be unique; incomparable. He does not compare himself to anyone else. He sets himself apart entirely: “I Am Who I Am.”

2. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Vs. 15:

God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations

- This name is entirely different from the “to be” verb, I Am Who I Am. The first name points to God’s holiness, otherness, and transcendence. The second name points to God’s nearness, his immanence, his comprehensibility. In the second name, God shows how he has freely chosen to bind himself to his people.
- It is because God is so radically different from us that he can be so very present with us. This is where Classical Theism – or the Classical Doctrine of God – weaves together so well with our understanding of the Gospel. Classical theism is the term attached to the doctrine of God hammered out in the first 4 centuries of the church.
Apostles Creed (180)
The Nicene Creed (Council of Nicea, 325)
The Nicene Creed was expanded at the Council of Constantinople (381)
- The leading lights at the Council of Constantinople were three men often times referred to as the Cappadocian Fathers. They were Basil the Great (330-379), Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389). The Cappadocian Fathers along with Augustine were the greatest theologians of the early church. Keep in mind, these were men who were directly descended from those Christians won to faith by the Apostles themselves. They were part of those most faithful churches – the churches around Thessalonica – in Asia Minor. These were men who spoke the Greek in which the New Testament was written.

- The Classical Doctrine of God presents us with those doctrines that we most often attacked by heresies in the first few centuries such as the doctrines of God's aseity, his tri-unity, simplicity, eternality, immutability, and impassibility. Those same doctrines are upheld in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

2.1: There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts [*simplicity*], or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

a. Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4, 6. • b. Jer 10:10; 1 Thes 1:9. • c. Job 11:7-9; 26:14. • d. John 4:24. • e. 1 Tim 1:17. • f. Deut 4:15-16; John 4:24 with Luke 24:39. • g. Acts 14:11, 15. • h. Mal 3:6; James 1:17. • i. 1 Kings 8:27; Jer 23:23-24. • k. Psa 90:2; 1 Tim 1:17. • l. Psa 145:3. • m. Gen 17:1; Rev 4:8. • n. Rom 16:27. • o. Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8. • p. Psa 115:3. • q. Exod 3:14. • r. Eph 1:11. • s. Prov 16:4; Rom 11:36. • t. 1 John 4:8, 16. • u. Exod 34:6-7. • w. Heb 11:6. • x. Neh 9:32-33. • y. Psa 5:5-6. • z. Exod 34:7; Nahum 1:2-3.

- In the *Apostle's Creed* we confess:

"We believe in God the Father Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth."

God is both the Almighty Maker of everything and our Father. This is the very truth we are taught in God's naming of himself. He is transcendent and immanent. He is both beyond us and near us. He is both incomprehensible and comprehensible.

- Two wrong assumptions we often make about mystery.

1. Mystery is failure

If God remains beyond me, then either he or I have failed.

2. Mystery will diminish my joy.

If God is mystery then there is no way to know him.

Mystery is a key to our understanding of and joy in the gospel.

- Belief in God is not an achievement. Everyone knows that God is and everyone worships. We even make up gods if we need to. The gods we make end up looking conspicuously like us. But



what is a sign of wisdom and growth is learning through God's Word that God is different from us – so very different – so grander than us – that God is not man writ large.

- Thomas Weinandy, a Roman Catholic Friar and systematic theologian has written:
“The true goal of theological inquiry is not resolving problems but discerning the mystery of God.”

The gospel demands mystery. Who can fully understand the depths of “God sent his Son into the world to save sinners”? Who can fully account for “God spared not his own Son but gave himself up for us all”? Who can fully plumb the depths of the justice and mercy that meet at the cross of Jesus Christ?

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