

What Can We Know about God?

Crucial Questions

R. C. SPROUL

What Can We Know about God?

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Chapter One

Knowledge of God

Several years ago, a well-known Christian school invited me to address the faculty and administration on this question: “What is a Christian college or university?” Upon my arrival, the dean gave me a tour of the campus. During the tour, I noticed this inscription on a set of office doors: “Department of Religion.” When it came time to address the faculty that evening, I mentioned the inscription I had seen, and I asked whether the department had always been called by that name. An older faculty member replied that

years ago the department had been called the “Department of Theology.” No one could tell me why the department name had been changed.

“Religion” or “theology”—what difference does it make? In the academic world, the study of religion has traditionally come under the broader context of either sociology or anthropology, because religion has to do with the worship practices of human beings in particular environments. Theology, by contrast, is the study of God. There is a big difference between studying human apprehensions of religion and studying the nature and character of God Himself. The first is purely natural in its orientation. The second is supernatural, dealing with what lies above and beyond the things of this world.

After explaining this in my lecture to the faculty, I added that a true Christian college or university is committed to the premise that the ultimate truth is the truth of God, and that He is the foundation and source of all other truth. Everything we learn—economics, philosophy, biology, mathematics—has to be understood in light of the overarching reality of the character of God. That is why, in the Middle Ages, theology was called “the queen of the sciences” and philosophy “her handmaiden.” Today

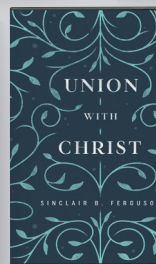
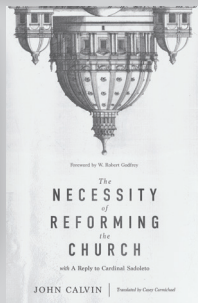
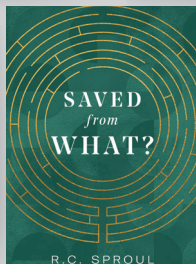
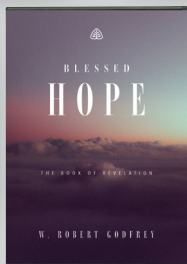
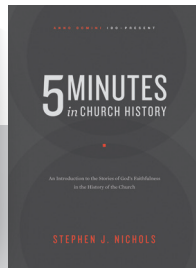
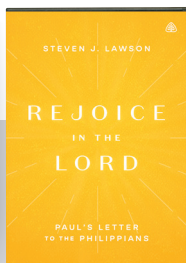
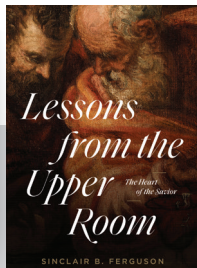
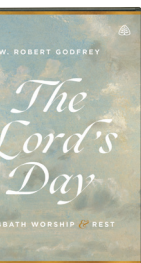
the queen has been deposed from her throne and, in many cases, driven into exile, and a supplanter now reigns. We have replaced theology with religion.

Theology Defined

The word *theology* shares a suffix, *-ology*, with the names of many disciplines and sciences, such as *biology*, *physiology*, and *anthropology*. The suffix comes from the Greek word *logos*, which we find in the opening of John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Greek word *logos* means "word" or "idea," or, as one philosopher translated it, "logic" (it is also the term from which we get the English word *logic*). So when we study biology, we are looking at the word or the logic of life. Anthropology is the word or logic about humans, *anthrōpos* being the Greek word for *man*. The primary part of the word *theology* comes from the Greek *theos*, which means "god," so theology is the study of the word or logic of God Himself.

Theology is a very broad term. It refers not only to God but to all God has revealed to us in sacred Scripture. Included in the discipline of theology is the study

We want to see men and women
around the world connect the deep truths
of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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