

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FAITH

THEOLOGY PROPER

A. Current Issues

1. Introduction

Concern over the direction of theology proper has already been noted. Liberal theology has deserted biblical foundations which enable proper study of God. Evangelical thinking is becoming blurred as it pursues practices which also undermine an appropriate understanding of the nature of God. We must commit to personally knowing God in spirit and in truth. According to McGrath, *The temptation to rely on others to tell us what God is like reflects both laziness and lack of confidence. Many evangelicals want to be told what is right rather than taking the trouble to check it out for themselves.*¹ That is a commitment every believer needs to make.

2. Faith Movement

The most frightening distortion of theology proper is not taking place among acknowledged cults but in the *faith movement*. As noted earlier, McGrath coined the term *power evangelism* which includes the faith movement. The enormity of the problem centers on the degree of heresy coupled with its enormous appeal. Consider the following quotes from leaders of the movement:

Satan conquered Jesus on the cross. Kenneth Copeland

You're not looking at Morris Cerullo-you're looking at God. You're looking at Jesus. Morris Cerullo

God has to be given permission to work in this earth realm on behalf of man...Yes! You are in control! So, if man has control, who no longer has it? God." Frederick K. C. Price

Man was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority. Kenneth E. Hagin²

Hanegraaff outlines four spiritual flaws of the Faith Movement which reveal a disregard for the Word of God as the basis for knowing God. How desperately do people need to hear that *we know God only through Jesus Christ, and we know Jesus Christ only through the Scripture.*³ The following list⁴ with quotes reveals the urgency of turning to the Word of God as our basis for faith and practice.

¹McGrath, p. 151.

²Quotes noted by Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, p. 11.

³McCullough, p. 74.

⁴Hanegraaff, p. 54.

- Deification of man - man was created as an exact duplicate of God, including size and shape.

God is not 437 feet tall, weighing 4000 pounds, and got a fist big around as this room. He's big, but He's not a monster. He measured out heaven with a nine-inch span...The distance between my thumb and my finger is not quite nine inches. So, I know he's bigger than me, thank God. Amen? But He's not some great, big, old thing that couldn't come through the door there and, you know, when He sat down, would fill every seat in the house. I don't serve the Glob. I serve God, and I've been created in His image and in His likeness.⁵

- Demotion of God - He is placed at the whims of His creation.

After Adam's fall, God found Himself in a peculiar position...God needed an avenue back into the earth...God laid out His proposition and Abram accepted it. It gave God access to the earth and gave man access to God...Technically, if God ever broke the Covenant, He would have to destroy Himself.⁶

- Deification of Satan - the God of this world with power over God.

Adam had revelation knowledge that flowed from God, the Father. But when Adam bowed his knee to Satan, he shut God out. God found Himself on the outside looking in. His man, Adam, had lost his authority. Satan...had become the god of the world system...Satan had gained ascendancy in the earth by gaining Adam's authority, and God was left on the outside. God couldn't come here in His divine power and wipe them out. He had to move in an area where it would be ruled legal by the Supreme Court of the Universe.⁷

- Demotion of Christ - His deity is compromised.

They crucified Me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God' I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me. Hallelujah.⁸

It is alarming to think that those in prominent positions in "Christianity" are actually moving away from a true understanding of theology proper even more than recognized cults. What makes a cult should be a question of concern, today. Professor John Hannah notes several factors: 1) *Doctrinal-essentials of the faith denied;* 2) *Leadership - renowned prophet;* and 3) *Authority-reduce authority of Scripture or add to it.*⁹ Each of these areas reveals the error of the Faith Movement.

⁵Jerry Savelle quoted in Hanegraaff, p. 122.

⁶Kenneth Copeland quoted in Hanegraaff, p. 126.

⁷Charles Capps quoted in Hanegraaff, pp. 133-134.

⁸Kenneth Copeland quoted in Hanegraaff, pp. 137-138.

⁹Class notes from Dr. John Hannah, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981.

3. Holiness of God

The theological failings of the Faith Movement are tied to what leads to every theological error, misunderstanding God, in His majesty and transcendence. McCullough well states the crying need of evangelicals, a proper view of God, *God is different-fundamentally different-from anything we could have imagined, from any god we might have created for ourselves. The biblical word for this difference is holy.*¹⁰ It is worth noting his discussion which follows:

Because God has provided a trustworthy self-revelation in Jesus Christ, we should look nowhere else for our understanding of holiness. In Christ we see the uniting of the complete otherness shown in the original religious use of the word and the mercy revealed in the ethical application of the word...Because God in Jesus Christ donned the humble clothing of human flesh, gladly bearing our weaknesses and suffering, assuming full responsibility for our selfish rebellion, and finally defeating the power of death itself-because God has done all this for us, we describe this one-way movement from heaven to earth by one word: grace.

Christians need a fresh dose of the holiness of God. Our study of theology must not be an exercise in defining God in our image, but submission to His authority and majesty. C. S. Lewis pictures well the otherness of God in his description of Aslan in *"The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe:"*

"Is-is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion-the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver. "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."¹¹

Our study of theology should be tempered by the same regard Mr. Beaver had for Aslan. *God is not safe, but God is good, very good.*¹² That was the attitude of Increase Mather whose personal struggles almost overwhelmed him until he submitted to the God Who is not safe but good. His recollection is worthy of study as one contemplates theology proper:

During the summer of 1670, when preacher Increase Mather had just turned 31, he began experiencing severe nightmares. He handled this "distress and Anguish" in Puritan fashion: pleading for God's love while submitting to God's sovereign will.

¹⁰McCullough, p. 74.

¹¹Quoted by McCullough, p. 86.

¹²McCullough, p. 86.

July 26. I was grievously assaulted with the Ephialtes [nightmares] in the night, so that I had little rest. The next day, I was in much distress and Anguish in my spirit, fearing lest all my Faith should prove phansy and delusion.

In this distress I betooke my selfe to Christ, and wept before him, saying, "Lord Jesus, let me bee destroyed, if you canst find in thi heart to destroy a poor creature who above all things desires to glorify thi Name. Here I am before thee, do to me and with me what you wilt. If you wilt glorify thiselfe in my confusion thi will be done; I have deserved that it should be so. But Oh that you wouldest pity me."

After I had thus cryed to the rock that is higher than I, I was somewhat revived. But the next day, I was sad and distressed beyond measure; I prayed earnestly and found some relief.

August 1. In the night I was vexed with troublesome dreames and forced to rise before day. So that I now again was ready to conclude that my Ephialtes would issue in a Mania [madness]...

I said before God, "Lord, I submitt wholly to thi will, but if you shalt give me my choice, then Lord, I would say, kill me out of hand, rather than that this evil which I fear should come upon me."

I had some perswasion that God heard my prayers, and beheld my Tears, because hee beheld the Tears of Hezekiah, and heard the prayers of weeping Jacob. And because there never was any one (I think so) that came to God with a desire of Flealth in a way of incessant prayer, and Fasting, and Faith; and that only that so hee might do service for God in Christ and glorify his Name, that yet was denyed his Request. And shall I be the only one whom God will deny such mercy to?

At last I came to this Resolution, "yea, though I dy for it, I am resolved to Trust in God for his salvation; and let come on me what the Lord will."¹³

B. Basic Outline of Theology Proper

1. Considerations in the study of God
 - a. Man's finite limitations make complete definition of infinite God impossible.
 - b. God is incomprehensible, Job 11:7; Isaiah 40:18.
 - c. God is knowable, John 17:3; 1 John 5:20.
2. Essence of God
 - a. Definition
 - 1) That which underlies all outward manifestation.
 - 2) To speak of God is to speak of an essence, not a mere idea or personification of an idea.
 - b. Components
 - 1) Spirituality
 - a) God is a spiritual substance, John 4:24.
 - b) He is immaterial and incorporeal, Luke 24:39.
 - c) He is invisible, John 1:18; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:16.
 - 1] Men have seen the reflection of God's glory but not His essence, Gen. 32:30.
 - 2] The redeemed shall one day see Him, Rev. 22:4; Mt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14.

¹³ From "The Autobiography of Increase Mather," in *Christian History Magazine*.

- 3] Theophanies are manifestations of deity in visible form:
 - a] Angel of the Lord, Gen. 16:7-14; 18:13-33; 22:11-18.
 - b] Identified as the Lord, Gen. 16:11 with v. 3; Exodus 3:2 with verse 4; Judges 6:12 with v. 16.

- 4] He is alive - not immaterial nor inanimate, Joshua 3:10; Rev. 7:2; Ps. 115:3.
- 5] He is a person
 - a] Self-consciousness, Ex. 3:14; 1 Cor. 2:10.
 - b] Self-determination, , Job 27:13; Rom. 9:11.
 - c] Characteristics of personality
 - 1} Intellect, Gen. 18:19; Acts 15:18.
 - 2} Emotion, Gen. 6:6; John 3:16.
 - 3} Will, Gen. 3:15; John 6:38.

- 2) Self-existence
 - a) Aquinas, He is the first cause, Himself uncaused, Ex. 3:14.
 - b) H exists by the necessity of His nature as the uncaused being.

- 3) Immensity
 - a) Gd is infinite in relation to space.
 - b) He is above space, 1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24-28.

- 4) Eternity
 - a) God is infinite in relation to time, Ps. 90:2.
 - b) He sees the whole as one unit, although He is aware of the sequence in process.

- 3. Nature of God
 - a. Unity
 - 1) There is but one God Whose divine nature is undivided and indivisible, Deut. 4:35; Mark 12:29-32; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6.
 - 2) He is the only God: Exodus 15:11; Zech. 14:9.

 - b. Diversity
 - 1) Trinity: three eternal distinctions in the one divine essence.
 - 2) Proofs
 - a) Intimations in the Old Testament
 - 1] Plural pronouns and verbs, Gen. 1:26; 11:7.
 - 2] The Lord is distinguished from the Lord, Gen. 19:24.
 - 3] The Son is distinguished from the Father, Isaiah 48:16; 9:6.
 - 4] The Spirit is distinguished from God, Gen. 1:2; 6:3.
 - 5] Triple use of holy, Isaiah 6:3.
 - 6] Triple benediction, Numbers 6:24-26.
 - 7] Appearances of the Angel of the Lord, Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-18; 31:11-13; Exodus 3:2-5; 14:19.

b) General statements and allusions in the New Testament

- 1] Baptism of Jesus, Matthew 3:16f.
- 2] The Comforter, John 14:6.
- 3] Baptismal formula, Matthew 28:19.
- 4] Apostolic benediction, 2 Cor. 13:14.

4. Attributes of God

a. Non-moral attributes

1) Omniscience

- a) God comprehends all things-past, present, future-things actual and possible, Psalms 139:1-6.
- b) He has knowledge without discovery of facts, Isaiah 40:13-14.
- c) His knowledge is complete-actual and possible.

2) Omnipresence

- a) God is everywhere with His whole being at the same time, Ps. 139:7-16.
- b) Closely related terms:
 - 1] Immensity-infinite in relation to space.
 - 2] Immanence-He is in the world, acting within and through His creation, rather than from without and upon it.
 - 3] Transcendence-the counterpart of immanence; God is above and beyond His creation-not bound by it.

3) Omnipotence

- a) God has infinite power which is available to every believer.
- b) He can do anything which does not contradict His nature.
- c) There is no effort to His power, Psalms 33:9.
- d) God alone can sustain life, Heb. 1:3; Psalms 36:6.

4) Immutability

- a) God never changes in His essence or nature, Ex. 3:14; Psalms 102:26-28; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17.
- b) God never changes His purposes but does change His procedures.

b. Moral attributes

1) Holiness

- a) God possesses absolute perfection, Isaiah 59:1-2.
- b) He is completely separate from evil in His person and in His dealings with men; Lev. 19:2; Psalms 99:9; 1 John 1:5.
- c) The greatest demonstration of God's holiness was at Calvary.

2) Righteousness (Justice)

- a) This is His holiness in relation to men.
- b) Righteousness implies a rule or law to which there is conformity-God's holy nature, Neh. 9:8; Psalms 145:17; John 17:25.

- 3) Truth
 - a) God is truth, John 14:6.
 - b) He is true in His dealings with His creation.
 - 1] Veracity-what God reveals of Himself and what He says.
 - 2] Faithfulness-He fulfills His promises.

- 4) Goodness
 - a) The outworking of God's holiness, righteousness, and truth.
 - b) Evidences of God's goodness:
 - 1] Love of God-means by which He communicates Himself.
 - 2] Benevolence of God-He deals tenderly with all His creatures, Mat. 5:45; Acts. 14:17.
 - 3] Mercy of God-goodness manifested toward those in misery or distress, Eph. 2:4.
 - 4] Grace of God-goodness manifested toward the ill-deserving.

C. Summary

According to John 17:3, eternal life is knowing the Father and the Son. Theology is our privilege and responsibility as believers. It is God's means of revealing Himself to His creation. If theology seems dull, maybe one has not caught a glimpse of the majesty of God. If it seems too difficult, maybe one has not comprehended the importance of rightly dividing the Word of Truth. We need clarity where there is much confusion. McCullough proposes, *The most important step that could be taken toward removing trivial gods from the altar of devotion and renewing faith in the one true God, the Holy One, would be for the church to rediscover the Bible, to open itself anew to its creative and redeeming Word.*¹⁴

The greatest challenge we face in theology is not protecting our doctrinal positions. There will always be heresy. Our greatest challenge is complacency. We must daily choose to submit personally to the God who is not safe, but good, very good.

¹⁴McCullough, p. 124.

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