

A misty forest scene with a path of fallen leaves and large rocks, serving as a background for the text. The forest is dense with tall, thin trees, and the ground is covered in a thick layer of brown and orange leaves. A bright light source, possibly the sun, is visible in the distance, creating a soft glow and mist. Several large, dark rocks are scattered along the path. The overall atmosphere is serene and contemplative.

What it means to Know God



Introduction

“Many of history’s greatest thinkers have wrestled with the ultimate question of belief and nonbelief in God.” This is the opening sentence on the inside flap of the dust jacket of Dr. Armand M. Nicholi’s book, *The Question of God*, in which he “allows them (C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud) to speak for themselves on every major question of belief and nonbelief.” As an associate professor of psychiatry, Nicholi’s popular course at Harvard University emerged after conducting research on these “two real and recognizable geniuses” for more than twenty-five years.

A young (35 years old) and brilliant scholar, R.C. Sproul (PhD, the Free University of Amsterdam) was already becoming well known as the



Introduction

staff theologian for Ligonier Valley Study Center in Pennsylvania and a Visiting Professor of Apologetics at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Boston when he presented his case for the existence of God in his classic book, *If There is a God, Why Are There Atheists?* In January of 1974, he ended his first chapter with these words: “Thus, far into the twentieth century the debate between theists and atheists continues. Why? Why is there not more agreement on this vital issue? How can such brilliant thinkers and competent scholars come to such radically divergent positions?” Then, beginning his second chapter, he writes, “Throughout the history of Western Civilization, the issue of the existence of God has not been settled once and for all.”



Introduction

Theologian John M. Frame goes to the heart of the debate when he writes, “Removing God from the world enables human autonomy. And, conversely, if our goal is to be autonomous, then we must either deny God’s existence altogether or convince ourselves that he is too far beyond us to have any practical influence in our lives...If you deny God’s transcendence, his control and authority, then you must believe that ultimate control and authority are vested in the finite world – that is, that the finite world is divine. If you deny the presence of God in creation, then you must believe that God is absent.” Ultimately, competing worldviews related to the existence and knowability of God contend for the hearts of all people.



Introduction

Beginning this series with perspectives from Drs. Nicholi, Sproul, and Frame is intended to raise important questions in your own mind and heart, especially the prime questions which come close to exhausting the issues that must be addressed by any worldview:

1. What is prime reality – the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to persons at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?

Introduction

These questions – if taken seriously - force us to consider what we really believe. In the end, we want assurances that we are right about our beliefs and confidence that our faith is not merely a form of psychological wish-fulfillment. No one wants to be deceived.

It should be noted from the outset that this series is not a course on apologetics, though it will raise questions which you may want to pursue further in your desire to know what is true - “the really real.” Rather, it is a course on – to use J.I. Packer’s book title – *Knowing God*. Our argument will be that, while God is incomprehensible, He is also knowable.



Why This Study Is Important

- **God can be known.** Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (Jn. 17:3). Paul: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10).
- **Our knowledge of God is finite and we long to know Him better.**
- **We secretly harbor doubts and don’t know how to resolve them.** “The heart of doubt is a divided heart” (Guinness).
- **We need to correct our wrong notions of who God is.**

Why This Study Is Important



J.I. Packer
1926 -

“Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life’s problems fall into place of their own accord.”

Why This Study Is Important

“You become like what you worship. When you gaze in awe, admiration, and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take on something of the character of the object of your worship.”



N.T. Wright

Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity
University of St. Andrews, Scotland

1948 -


Our Starting Point

- “What we believe are the rails upon which our lives run. And when our beliefs match up to the facts, we have truth” (the Correspondence Theory of Truth).
- “Facts are totally unforgiving. Facts are what we run into when we are wrong.”
- “One must think, and thinking is hard.”



Dallas Willard, PhD

Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, 1965-2013
1935-2013



Epistemology: How We Know

- ***Epistemon*** is the Greek word translated *knowledge, understanding*. The noun is found in the book of James: “Who among you is wise and **understanding**? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom” (3:13).
- **Epistemology**, *n.*, “the theory of knowledge and understanding, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion.”
- “Epistemology is the study of knowledge” (Vern Sheridan Poythress).
- Epistemology is how we know what we know.



The Meaning Of *Knowledge*

- **Ginoskein (knowledge)**, *v.*, this word “denotes in ordinary Greek the intelligent comprehension of an object or matter, whether this comes for the first time, or comes afresh, into the consideration of the one who grasps it (‘to come to know,’ ‘to experience,’ ‘to perceive again’) or whether it is already present (‘to perceive’).
- “It denotes close acquaintance with something.”
- We come to have this knowledge through seeing, hearing, investigating, and reflecting – and revelation.
- “I believe no finite knowledge can be isolated from the infinite knowledge that God has, and no finite knowledge is isolatable from communion with infinitude” (Vern Poythress).



Ways Of Knowing: Carl F.H. Henry

- How is it that a person comes to know, to perceive, to understand?
- What are the sources of our spiritual beliefs?
- What method or methods do we use for verification of our beliefs?
- Is religious assertion simply a matter of faith?
- What is the relationship between faith and knowledge?
- “Is faith essentially emotive, volitional, moral or intellectual? Do religious assertions rest on authority, intuition, experience, speculation, or personal preference and prejudice?”

Consider the following four ways of knowing: