

**Study Guide for *Systematic
Theology, Doctrine of God*, by
Louis Berkhof**

**Extra Reading for the course:
"We Believe in God"**

ACADEMIC
PACKET

**RESOURCES FOR GROUPS
USING THE ACADEMIC PACKETS**



Read Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology, Part I (The Doctrine of God)*. This reading is divided in two sections: "The Being of God," chapters 1-8, pages 18-107, and "The Works of God," chapters 1-6, pages 108-195.

PREPARATION QUESTIONS

1. What do you hope to learn in the study of the doctrine of God?
2. What is the difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God?
3. We often tend to distort the true biblical description of God, either by thinking of Him more like ourselves, more like our earthly fathers, or more like some current cultural understanding of God. Are you willing to let the Bible change the way you view God?
4. How can you keep this study of God from becoming a mere intellectual exercise, and make it a process of actually coming closer to God?

J.I. Packer says,

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the "eternal life" that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God.¹

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 33.

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD), CHAPTER 1, THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. According to Berkhof, where is the evidence for the existence of God primarily found? Where is it found secondarily?
2. Does Berkhof believe that anyone is really born an atheist?
3. Note the different forms of denying the existence of God mentioned by Berkhof.
4. What term is used to identify the belief that God is identified with the world, not distinct from creation, that He is immanent, but impersonal?
5. Mention some religious expressions of the belief that God is finite and personal.
6. How does modern liberal theology tend to think of God?
7. "The New Psychologists inform us that the idea of God is a projection of _____."
8. Describe each argument for the existence of God:

The ontological argument

The cosmological argument

The teleological argument

The moral argument

The historical or ethnological argument

9. What does Berkhof state about the efficacy of the arguments for the existence of God?
10. What is Berkhof's general attitude toward the arguments for the existence of God? Should we use them?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1. How did you come to believe in God?
2. What do you think? Should we use the traditional arguments for the existence of God to evangelize a non-believer? If yes, which one seems better? Explain your answer.
3. How would you defend your faith in God?

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD),CHAPTER 2, THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that God is incomprehensible yet knowable?
2. According to reformed theology, what is the best way to answer the question of whether God can be known by man?
3. Explain the view of Hume regarding the existence of God.
4. What is the basic postulate of the school of thought called "Positivism?"
5. What philosopher is called the "father of Positivism" by Berkhof?
6. How does reformed theology understand man's "innate" knowledge of God?
7. What is the term often used to describe revelation found in nature, in human consciousness, and in God's providential governing of the world?
8. What is the term often used to describe revelation embodied in the Bible?
9. What was the difference between the Reformers and the Scholastics in their view of man's ability to know God through natural revelation?
10. "When the chill winds of Rationalism swept over Europe, _____ was exalted at the expense of supernatural revelation."
11. What is the name of the theologian who shifted the emphasis from objective revelation to subjective "religion"?
12. Did Barth recognize any revelation in Scripture? In nature?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1. Think about nature. Mention some attributes of God that can be seen in certain aspects of creation. For example, what can be learned about God from the ocean, the stars, or a flower?
2. Mention some aspects of God that you CANNOT learn from nature.

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD),CHAPTER 3, RELATION OF THE BEING AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. According to Berkhof, in what sense was some of the language of the early Church, the Middle Ages and the Reformation too strong regarding the question of whether man can know God?
2. In what sense did Calvin speak of the Divine essence as incomprehensible?
3. "From the simplicity of God it follows that God and His _____ are one."

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD),CHAPTER 4, THE NAMES OF GOD

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give the meaning of the following Old Testament names of God:

'El, 'Elohim, and 'Elyon
'Adonai
Shaddai NS 'El Shaddai
Yahweh and Yahweh Tsebhaoth

2. Give the meaning of the following New Testament names of God:

Theos
Kurios
Pater

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1. What is the name of God that is most significant for you? Why?

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD),CHAPTER 5,THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD IN GENERAL

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the different ways the attributes of God have been classified?
2. According to Berkhof, what is the difference between "incommunicable" attributes and "communicable" attributes of God?

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD),CHAPTER 6, THE INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give the meaning of the following incommunicable attributes of God:

self-existence (aseitas)

Immutability

Infinity

Unity

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD),CHAPTER 7, THE COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does the author mean when he says that God's knowledge is "archetypal"?
2. What does the author mean when he says that God's knowledge is "innate and immediate"?
3. What does the author mean when he says that God's knowledge is "simultaneous"?
4. What is the distinction between the "necessary" knowledge of God and the "free" knowledge of God?
5. Explain the concept of "scientia media."
6. What theological term is used to express God's perfect and complete knowledge?
7. What does Berkhof say about whether man can fully solve the problem of how to reconcile God's complete foreknowledge with man's freedom?
8. What is Berkhof's approach to the problem of reconciling God's complete foreknowledge with man's freedom?
9. According to Berkhof, does God's foreknowledge of future things and of contingent events rest on His decree?
10. Does Berkhof teach that God has decreed man's decisions?
11. How does Berkhof describe man's free will?
12. How does the author define "grace" en general?
13. What term is used to describe the goodness of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts?
14. "The Hebrew word for 'to be holy,' 'qdash,' is derived from the root 'qad,' which means to _____."
15. What word is used in theology to describe God's absolute authority over all things?
16. What word is used in theology to express God's complete power to execute His will?

17. What is meant by distinguishing God's "preceptive" will and His "decretive" will?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1. What are some of the attributes of God that you most appreciate and admire?

2. What are some of the communicable attributes of God that you would like to have more strongly developed in your own life?

3. In what sense are attributes such as the omniscience and the sovereignty of God "communicable"?

4. Do you think that the sovereignty of God and the prior knowledge of God can be reconciled with the freedom of man? How?

5. How does it personally affect you to know that God is totally sovereign and omniscient?

SECTION 1 (THE BEING OF GOD),CHAPTER 8, THE HOLY TRINITY

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who was the first to use the term "Trinity"?
2. When did the Church formulate its doctrine of the Trinity?
3. After the Reformation, were the earlier errors regarding the doctrine of the Trinity repeated?
4. Does Berkhof agree that the doctrine of the Trinity is clearly revealed in the plural form of God ("Elohim") used in Genesis 1:26?
5. Does Berkhof think that The Old Testament contains a full revelation of the trinitarian existence of God?
6. Explain the key propositions used to explain the doctrine of the Trinity.
7. How does Berkhof respond to the analogies given to explain the Trinity?
8. Describe the distinctive properties of each of the three persons of the Trinity.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1. What difference does it make to you personally to know that God is a Trinity? Think of what would be different if God were NOT a Trinity.
2. Do you think that the concept of the Trinity can be fully understood?

SECTION 2 (THE WORKS OF GOD), CHAPTER 1, THE DIVINE DECREES IN GENERAL

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How is the decree of God defined in the Westminster Shorter Catechism?
2. How does the author define God's "necessary knowledge"?
3. How does the author define God's "free knowledge"?
4. According to the author, what kind of knowledge is the "perfect fountain" for His decree?
5. "While the _____ knowledge of God logically precedes the decree, His _____ knowledge logically follows it."
6. Does Berkhof agree that predestination is conditioned on God's foreknowledge?
7. According to Berkhof, when God orders the universe so that man will pursue a certain course of action, is it the same as commanding him to do so?
8. "The decree to create is not _____ itself,..."
9. Does Berkhof argue that God's decree is immutable?
10. "The various elements in the decree are indeed mutually _____, but nothing in the plan is _____ by anything that is not in the decree."
11. Does the author believe that God's decree includes contingent events?
12. How does Berkhof explain the relationship between God's decree and man's sin?
13. "It is customary to speak of the decree of God respecting moral evil as _____."
14. "By His decree God rendered the sinful actions of man infallibly certain without deciding to _____ them by acting _____ upon and in the finite will."
15. Does the author believe that God has decreed the free acts of man? Then are the actors responsible for their acts?
16. What does the author say about the crucifixion of Jesus and the responsibility of the Jews who killed him?

17. According to Berkhof, what is true human freedom? Did God establish laws regarding freedom?
18. According to the author, does God effectuate by His own direct action whatsoever comes to pass?
19. According the Berkhof, how would the Arminians understand the foreknowledge of God and how it relates to the free will of man?
20. Berkhof argues that God is not the author of sin, but rather the author of _____.
21. According to the author, does God decree to produce evil desires in man?
22. "The problem of God's relation to sin remains a _____ for us...."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND APPLICATION

1. How do you understand the relationship between the decree of God and the freedom of man?
2. Does it affect your daily decisions to know that God has decreed everything that happens? Explain your answer

SECTION 2 (THE WORKS OF GOD), CHAPTER 2, PREDESTINATION

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What schools of theology believed that predestination to salvation or damnation is founded on God's foreknowledge?
2. What is the key concept of semi-Pelagianism?
3. According to Berkhof, does predestination include God's predetermination of who will be condemned?
4. What is the final aim of predestination?
5. What is supralapsarianism (as it developed later, not as in its original form)?
6. What is infralapsarianism (as it developed later, not as in its original form)?
7. What is Berkhof's view of the debate between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND APPLICATION

1. Do you believe in predestination? Why or why not? How would you defend your answer using the Scriptures? What practical difference does it make whether you believe in predestination or not?
2. How do you understand the relation between God's foreknowledge and predestination?
3. How would you explain that man is free and responsible for his own actions if God has decreed everything?
4. If God predestines who will be saved, why should we evangelize?
5. Do you believe in infralapsarianism or supralapsarianism? What practical difference does it make to you which position you hold?

SECTION 2 (THE WORKS OF GOD), CHAPTER 3, CREATION IN GENERAL

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Does Scripture teach that creation is an act of all three persons of the Trinity?
2. According to the author, what is the best way to solve the problem of how God could just remain inactive throughout eternity, before creating the universe?
3. Describe each theory of the origin of the world:

Dualism

Emanation

Evolution

SECTION 2 (THE WORKS OF GOD), CHAPTER 4, CREATION OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Are angels eternal beings, not part of the creation?
2. According to the author, are angels spiritual beings, without bodies?
3. Can angels be in more than one place at once?
4. Are angels rational, moral, and immortal?
5. Did all angels fall into sin?
6. Describe each kind of angel:

Cherubim

Seraphim

Gabriel

Michael

7. What are the ordinary services of the good angels?
8. What are the extraordinary services of the good angels?
9. Do the fallen evil angels have superhuman powers?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND APPLICATION

1. Have you ever thought much about angels? What difference does it make to you whether they exist or not?

SECTION 2 (THE WORKS OF GOD), CHAPTER 5, CREATION OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the greatest difference between the Babylonian story of creation and the biblical account?
2. What is Berkhof's view of the days of creation? Were they long periods of time?
3. What phrase points to a literal interpretation of the days of creation in Genesis 1?
4. How does Berkhof deal with the apparent differences between Genesis 2 and Genesis 1?
5. Describe each theory of harmonizing the creation narrative in Genesis with the findings of science.

The ideal or allegorical interpretation

The mythical theory of modern philosophy

The restitution theory

The concordistic theory

6. Does Berkhof believe that the theory of evolution can be harmonized with the biblical narrative of creation? Explain.
7. Does Berkhof believe that the Darwinian theory of evolution fits the scientific evidence? Explain.
8. Does the author agree with the theory of "theistic evolution"? Explain.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND APPLICATION

1. What is your view of the days of creation? Why is it important to you whether the days of creation were literal or not?
2. What do you think about the theory of evolution? Can it be somehow harmonized with the biblical account of creation? Is it scientifically sound? What practical difference does it make whether you believe in evolution or not?
3. How do you think we can harmonize scientific evidence that supposedly points to a very old earth with the biblical account of creation?

SECTION 2 (THE WORKS OF GOD), CHAPTER 6, PROVIDENCE

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does "providence" mean, in its general theological usage?
2. Describe each aspect of providence:

Preservation

Concurrence

Government

3. What word is used for something God does immediately or without the mediation of second causes in their ordinary operation, above the established order of nature?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1. Does the doctrine of God's providence comfort you? How does it help you when something bad happens to you?
2. What difference does it make to you to know God is governing all things?