

The Teachings of Christianity

Lesson 1.1

God: Natural and Revealed Knowledge; Triune God

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John 17:3

Introduction:

If there is a God, can we prove He exists? If God exists, how do we speak about Him? How do we come to know God? If God is almighty, why is there suffering and evil in the world? Many questions about God have been asked throughout the history of mankind. Do we have all the answers to questions about God? Where do we go for the answers and how do we know what's true?

✠ *John 1:18*

✠ *Exodus 33:20*

✠ *1 Tim 6:16*

Book of Concord:

Apology of the Augsburg Confession: *We believe and teach that there is one divine, undivided essence. Yet, there are three distinct persons of the same divine essence, and coeternal: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*¹

READ: Augsburg Confession Article I and Apology of AC Article I.

The Natural and Revealed Knowledge of God:

*"The only source of man's knowledge of God is God's self-revelation. There can be no absolute knowledge of God independent of God's self-revelation, because God dwells in the light which no man can approach, 1 Tim. 6:16. God has revealed Himself in a twofold manner: a) In creation, or in the realm of nature, and b) in His Word, or in Holy Scripture, the only source and norm of Christian doctrine. Accordingly we distinguish between a natural and a Christian knowledge of God."*²

Martin Chemnitz: *"The knowledge of God is twofold: the natural knowledge of God and the revealed knowledge of God. Between these two aspects of the knowledge of God there is a vast difference, an understanding of which is necessary in order to answer certain troublesome questions."*³

Natural Knowledge of God

*What can be known of God if he has not spoken directly to us? When people speak about "knowing God," they often base their claims on some personal experience or overpowering feeling. They "know God" through the beauty of a sunset, the majesty of the mountain peaks or the incredible order of the universe. They "know God" through the moral order of society or the uniqueness of human reason and love. In Christian theology, this is called the **natural knowledge** of God. It is information that is revealed through God's "fingerprints" in creation.*⁴

Read Luther's Small Catechism: Questions 105-106, p. 129.

¹ McCain, P. T., ed. (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 74). Concordia Publishing House.

² Pieper, F. (1953). *Christian Dogmatics* (electronic ed., Vol. 1, p. 371). Concordia Publishing House.

³ Chemnitz, M., & Preus, J. A. O. (1999). *Loci theologici* (electronic ed., p. 51). Concordia Publishing House.

⁴ Mueller, S. P., ed. (2005). *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Vol. 3, p. 28). Wipf & Stock Publishers.

How has God revealed Himself in Nature?

1. Creation

† **Romans 1:19-20**

† **Psalm 14:1**

† **Psalm 19:1**

“While God indeed manifests Himself in nature, neither nature itself nor the forces in nature may be identified with God. Pantheism is the belief that God and the universe are identical. As we distinguish the building from the builder, so must we distinguish creation from the Creator”.

*“It is preposterous folly to assume that the things we see about us in nature came of themselves, and that this well-ordered universe with its myriads of diverse animate and inanimate beings is the product of blind chance and evolution. As rational man contemplates the wonderful works of nature, he must ask himself where these things came from and how do they exist. **His ordinary common sense will tell him that there must have been Some One who made them, and that there still is Some One by whose power they continue to exist. And this Some One is God.**”⁵*

2. The Conscience of Man

† **Romans 2:15 (1:32)**

“In the realm of nature and in history God approaches man through things outside man. By writing His Law in the heart of man, however, God confronts man directly from within man’s nature. He manifests Himself as the holy and righteous God, who demands and rewards the good and condemns and punishes the evil.”⁶

3. Many False Religions

“The testimony of nature and of conscience for the existence of God is a fact which no sane person will deny. It’s always been the concern of rational man to establish some sort of relation between himself and God. “No people has ever been so reprobate as not to institute and observe some divine worship.”⁷

Martin Luther - Large Catechism 1st Commandment: *“On the other hand, you can easily see and sense how the world practices only false worship and idolatry. For no people have ever been so corrupt that they did not begin and continue some divine worship. Everyone has set up as his special god whatever he looked to for blessings, help, and comfort.”⁸*

Conclusion: *In man’s present condition the natural knowledge of God is entirely insufficient to attain salvation. It arouses the conscience of man, but it cannot quiet the awakened conscience; it shows man that there is a God and a divine Law, but it does not enable man to keep this Law.”⁹*

Revealed or Christian Knowledge of God

Because humans are constantly looking in the wrong places and listening to the wrong voices, God must speak clearly if we are to hear him, know him and believe. Revealed Knowledge isn’t extra knowledge so we can make sense of the natural knowledge, revealed knowledge is the only way to truly know God and be saved. Revealed knowledge is God speaking to us with His words in order to reveal who He is and create saving faith in Jesus.

† **John 20:30-31**

† **1 John 5:13**

⁵ Koehler, E. W. A. (1999). *A summary of Christian doctrine: a popular presentation of the teachings of the Bible* (electronic ed., p. 20). Concordia Publishing House.

⁶ Pieper, F. (1953). *Christian Dogmatics* (electronic ed., Vol. 1, p. 372). Concordia Publishing House.

⁷ Koehler, E. W. A. (1999). *A summary of Christian doctrine: a popular presentation of the teachings of the Bible* (electronic ed., p. 21). Concordia Publishing House.

⁸ McCain, P. T., ed. (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 360). Concordia Publishing House.

⁹ Pieper, F. (1953). *Christian Dogmatics* (electronic ed., Vol. 1, p. 374). Concordia Publishing House.

We know concerning the **essence** of God nothing more, and nothing more specific, than what the Bible teaches. We acquire, indeed, from this source no adequate and complete knowledge of the essence of God; for this **transcends our powers of comprehension**, and for this reason the Scriptures declare the incomprehensibility of the divine essence. But we may very well be content with the knowledge imparted to us through the Holy Scriptures, as we nevertheless learn therefrom as much about God and his essence as is **needful for our salvation** (Schmid, p.120-121).

† **1 Timothy 6:16**

† **1 John 3:2**

† **Romans 11:33**

The Christian knowledge of God, which is derived from God's Word, the Bible, is **Trinitarian**; in other words: the Christian knows that the **one true God** is Father and Son and Holy Ghost.

The Triune God:

- The word **Trinity** is not in the Bible.
- We look at all of Scripture to see how God reveals Himself.
 - **There Is One God**
 - **The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God/Divine**
 - **The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons in one divine being.**

One God:

† **Deuteronomy 6:4**

† **1 Cor 8:4**

The Bible demands a monotheistic worship.

† **Exodus 20:3**

† **Mark 12:29-30**

The Trinity Revealed in Scripture:

Luther's Small Catechism Question 36: *The true God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, crucified and raised from the dead for us. Jesus shows us the Father. The Father and Son give the Holy Spirit, who always points us to Jesus Christ, the Father's only Son. Thus, the only true God is the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three distinct persons in one divine being (the Holy Trinity).*¹⁰

† **Gen 1:1-3**

† **Matt 3:16-17**

† **John 1:1-3**

† **Matt 28:19**

† **2 Cor 13:14**

† **Eph 4:4-6**

¹⁰ Luther. (2017). *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (p. 63). Concordia Publishing House.