

THE MAGNITUDE OF GOD

“Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons...”
—JOB 38:31-32

The above verse is God speaking to Job out of the storm, and is a humbling reminder of the magnitude of God. The Christian life is about knowing God, but in this life, we'll never arrive at that. It's a continual pursuit, which is not measured by how much activity we're engaged in, or how much doctrine we know, but how well we know God.

One of the tasks of Christian scholars throughout history has been to produce systems of theology, whereby we come to know God. It's called 'Systematic Theology' and involves taking all the statements in Scripture about any particular subject from Genesis to Revelation, and trying to put them into a big, cohesive picture of God. That may be helpful in getting a comprehensive idea of what the issue is, but it has a huge weakness in that it tends to reduce God into a logical structure, which, as God, He is unable to fit.

If we look into the sky on a clear night, we'll see constellations. They're given names like “The Big Dipper”, “Orion”, “The Plough”, but what we actually see are lights in different parts of the sky. Imaginary lines are drawn between them to create a shape, which gives them their name. That is more or less what systematic theology does. It draws lines to link statements about God together in order to create a logical, coherent picture. But the problem is that all the lines between the stars don't exist in reality, but they're given the same authority as the stars themselves. That's the danger of systematic theology; drawing imaginary lines

between Scripture passages about God and giving them the same authority as the passages. It's out of context and it's guesswork.

Instead of a system which tries to put everything into one neat package, we need to allow Scripture, in its context, to speak. We should always give biblical theology priority over systematic theology. If Matthew's Gospel seems to say something different to John's Gospel, then hold them both with authority, even though some things may be held in tension.

If we could fit God into a neat, coherent system, He wouldn't be a very big God. There comes a point where we stand back and say, "I can see this and this and this, and though I can't make the connection, I submit to Him and worship Him." That's not a cop out by any means. That's recognizing there are dangers in reducing God to one predictable pattern.

PRAYER: Dear Father, I am grateful that the journey of coming to know You is a never-ending one. Thank You for what You have revealed, and may I continue to grow in knowledge of You.

TO REFLECT UPON: In my knowledge of God, have I reduced Him to any particular pattern?