

Western Theology Lesson #9 Enlightenment

Intro: The Enlightenment's elevation of reason and the downplaying of traditional authority posed challenges and presented opportunities for Christianity. The Christian response to the Enlightenment puts the mystery of humanity in the mysterious nature of the Creator of the universe in Whose Image man is made.

- The Enlightenment both strengthened and challenged Christianity.
- The emphasis on reason when it detracts from faith becomes a competitor to Christianity. But it can also help faith as reason comes along to help think more reasonably about our faith.
- Our faith is the confidence that rests on evidence that we look at with our reason. As a result our faith becomes stronger!

Lecture: Theology is very important for everything. What we believe about God shapes and informs what we believe about EVERYTHING else.

- Most importantly, theology tells us who we are as humans. Psalms 139:14 tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. This is the important reason why we should worship God!
- The question about who we are and our condition is answered in our understanding of God i.e. our Theology.
- The Age of Reason is another name for the Enlightenment.
- In the middle ages we also learned many great things. But in the middle ages things were learned by authority more than just independent reasoning.
- In the past, many people only had their nobles or educated to trust for information.
- Church leaders had information about salvation so people like Galileo and Copernicus were shunned when they used reason with evidence to challenge the established knowledge of the Church.
- Renaissance is French for 'Rebirth'. 14 & 15th centuries.
- So REASON became the primary way of gaining knowledge.
- How far can our reason take us? What does that mean theologically?
- We see that REASON can only take us so far and that FAITH will also have a very important role.
- Epistemology is a word that describes how we as humans arrive at knowledge i.e. how are we able to truly understand the world around us.
- What does Epistemology with our experience of being human?? It's only our humanness that gives us the ability to even ask those questions.
- How do I know something is true?
- Self reflection is uniquely human.
- Let's start with the Bible, for it tells us how we can know anything is true.
- As Christians, we can use our reason to know about God BUT ultimately we must also exercise our FAITH as well.
- Faith is based on God's revelation to us and the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- God and His character can be plainly seen in the world around us.
- But at the same time, the Bible tells us that God is too high for human reason to reach!

- Early church fathers i.e. Tertulian and Augustine, stressed that our knowledge of God can only be learned by revelation so needs to be accepted by FAITH.
- But there are also other early church fathers that give more weight to reasoning and philosophy e.g. Justin Martyr, Clemente and Origin.
- Justin Martyr praised philosophers i.e. Greeks and claimed that there were "pre-Christians" of sorts!!!
- Should we today avoid the extremes of Tertulian and Justin? Yes.
- Tertrarch was a churchman that some call the Father of Enlightenment. He thought we could learn much for about God if we didn't solely rely on "those authorities" that had ALL ideas set in stone.
- Scientists of the Renaissance considered the world a "well oiled machine".
- Deism emerged at this time. They believed God set the creation and its laws in motion and just let it run on its own. God didn't need to intervene anymore with miracles. It was a miracle enough that God set the universe in motion.
- The alternative to Deism is Theism. That God was directly managing every rhythm of creation even breaking the laws of nature, intervening at any time.
- We need to reconcile reason and revelation. Both are part of the human experience. We must draw on both in order to have a clear understanding of the material world, ourselves and of GOD!
- That said, we still end up with a degree of mystery.
- All questions however, are centered in Christ i.e. God becoming flesh.
- Christianity is the best answer in answering the puzzles to our humanity.