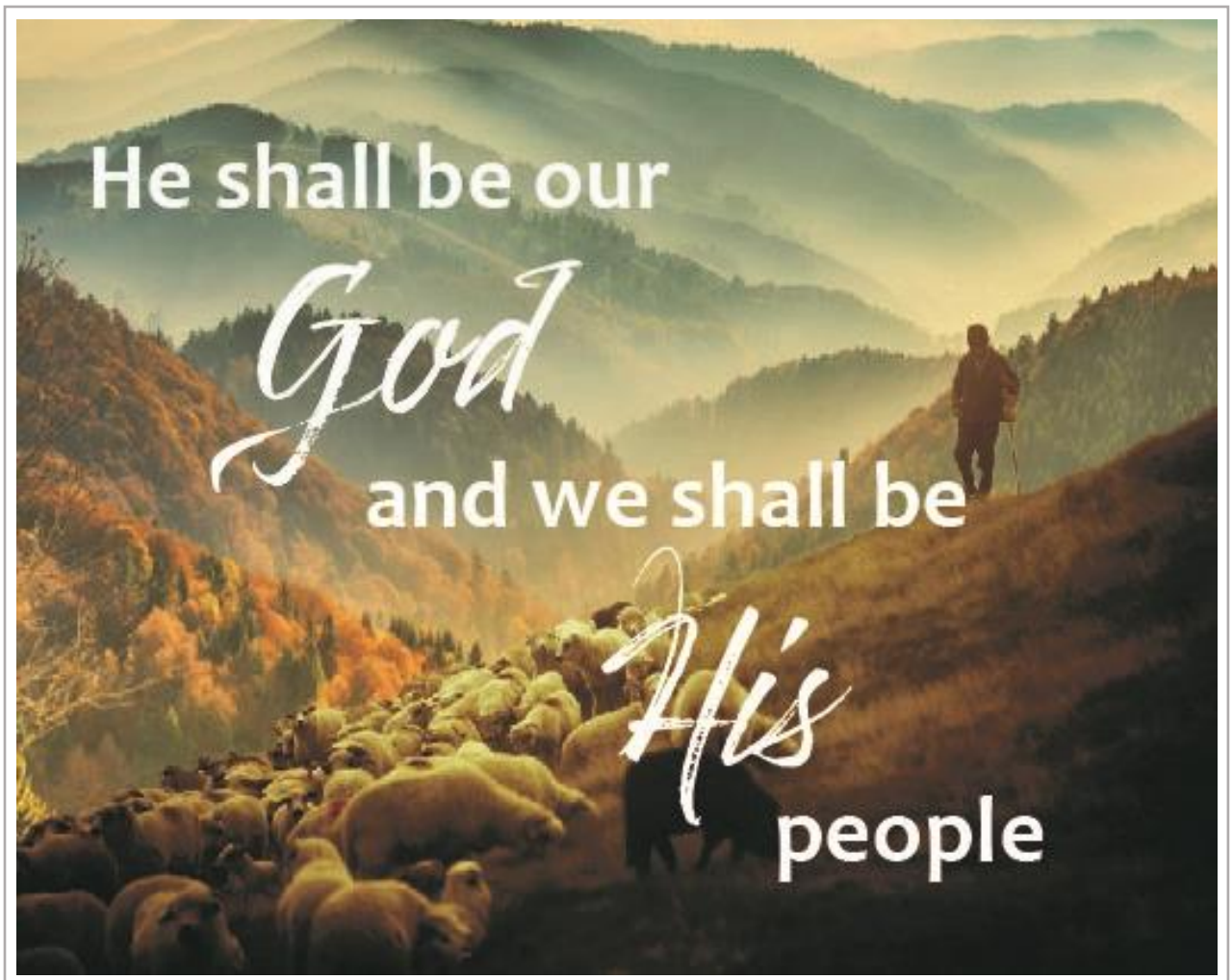


# OUR AWESOME GOD

The Nature and Character of Our Heavenly Father

Sunday: Portraits of God



Prepared by Jonathan Caldwell

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2023

[www.wearesimplychristians.com](http://www.wearesimplychristians.com)

# INTRODUCTION

He shall be our God and we shall be His people! We could make an argument that this is the main theme of scripture. Since the garden, God has shown and expressed a desire to dwell with man. The lengths to which He's gone to accomplish that are astounding – not least of which was sending His son to die on a cross. But for that relationship to work and grow as God desires, we must continue our upward growth to be more like Him.

We shall be holy as God is holy! This is the constant refrain in the book of Leviticus. Peter uses this phrase to encourage his readers in their daily walk. There are certain characteristics of God that we cannot emulate – His power, wisdom, omniscience. But we are commanded to live lives of love, sacrifice, and holiness.

If He is going to be our God and if we are going to be like Him, then we must know Him better. We must spend time with Him. We must talk to Him and let Him talk to us. To accomplish this, we want to begin the year with a foundational study of God, the Father. Who is He? What is He like? How does scripture describe Him? What are the pictures of Him in scripture? But, as we often say, this is not just an academic exercise. We are not just writing a report on the nature of God. We want to understand God so we can be, think, and act more like Him. This will be academic, but we want to press on to the practical.

On *Sundays* we will study various stories of the Bible which show us different **Portraits of God** in His relationship with mankind. We will look at creation, the Exodus, the conquest of Israel, and many more events. With these stories in mind, we will consider God as creator, deliverer, sustainer, judge, and other roles that He fills as God of heaven and earth.

On *Wednesdays* we will consider the various aspects of God's nature and His character (i.e. His eternal nature, His love, His holiness, etc.). This **Study of God** will balance Sunday's lessons as we consider who God is and how He works.

This will be a truly theological study. We will scour scripture to see what it says about God, and we will consider how we can be more like Him. We shall be holy as God is holy!

*Jonathan Caldwell*

# OUR AWESOME GOD

The Nature and Character of Our Heavenly Father

## Sundays: Portraits of God

Date	Topic
Sunday, January 1	1. God as Architect
Sunday, January 8	2. God as Deliverer
Sunday, January 15	3. God as Father
Sunday, January 22	4. God as Husband
Sunday, January 29	5. God as Warrior
Sunday, February 5	6. God as Provider
Sunday, February 12	7. God as Farmer
Sunday, February 19	8. God as a Shepherd
Sunday, February 26	9. God as Physician
Sunday, March 5	10. God as Promise Keeper
Sunday, March 12	11. God as Sovereign
Sunday, March 19	12. God as Divine Patron
Sunday, March 26	13. God as Judge

# Lesson 1

## God as Architect

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1. What does an architect do? For what are they responsible?
2. Where does God clearly act as an architect?
3. What are some signs of logic and order in his work?
4. Consider the following passages: Psalm 104:2-9; Isaiah 48:13; Job 38:4-10; Proverbs 8:27-31
5. Consider God's design of the tabernacle and temple.
6. What can we take away from the descriptions of the perfect temples in Ezekiel 40-48 and Revelation 21?
7. How is this architectural language used of the church?
8. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?



# Lesson 2

## God as Deliverer

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1. Who, throughout history, have been known as deliverers or saviors of their people?
2. When you consider God as a deliverer, what Bible story comes to mind?
3. The Exodus was – and still is – the great act of deliverance in the Israelite/Jewish tradition. Consider Exodus 6:1-8. Why is this passage so important in Exodus and for the entirety of the Old Testament story?
4. If God is the deliverer, what role did Moses serve?
5. What did God do to free His people from Egyptian bondage?
6. Throughout their history, why do the Israelites keep trying to go back to Egypt?
7. What is Jeremiah talking about in Jeremiah 16:14-15 and 23:7-8?
8. In what other stories does God act as deliverer?
9. From what does Jesus Christ deliver us?
10. How can Exodus 6:1-8 apply to us and sin?
11. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?

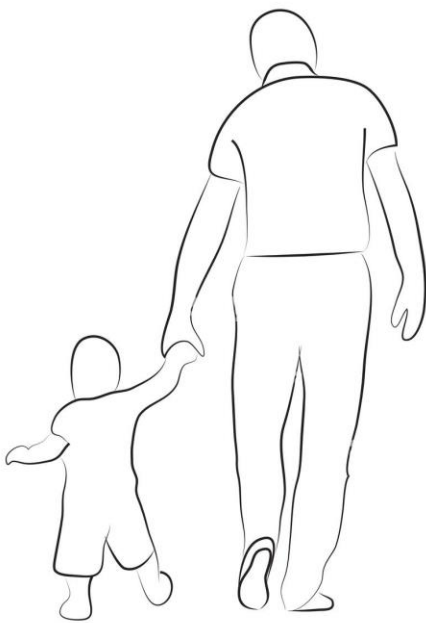


# Lesson 3

## God as Father

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1. According to scripture, what is the job of fathers?
2. Make a list of good and bad fathers throughout the Bible story.
3. Make a list of the fatherly characteristics of God from these verses:  
Deuteronomy 8:5; Psalm 103:13; Proverbs 3:11-12; Matthew 6:15; 10:29-31;  
Luke 6:36; 23:46; James 1:17; 1 John 3:1.

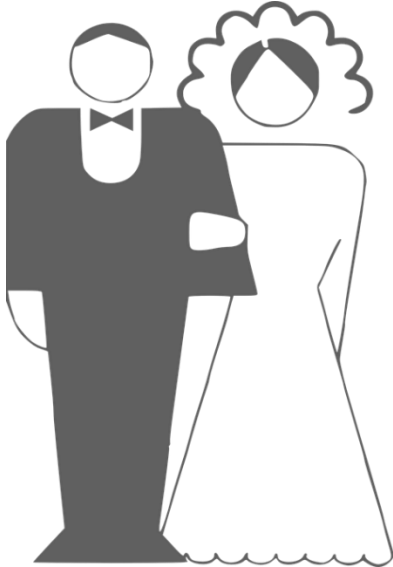


4. In what stories do we see God acting as a Father?
5. What do we learn about God as Father in His relationship with Jesus?
6. What might be an inappropriate response to viewing God as our Father?
7. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?

# Lesson 4

## God as Husband

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1. What role does the husband have in marriage?  
In the family?
2. Make a list of good and bad husbands throughout the Bible story.
3. How does the prophet Hosea vividly depict God as Husband?
4. How does the prophet Ezekiel vividly depict God as Husband in chapter 16?
5. What do the following passages teach about God as Husband? Isaiah 50:1-2; 54:5-7; Isaiah 62:3-5; Jeremiah 2:1-11; James 4:4-5; the Song of Solomon?
6. We typically think of Jesus as the husband and the church as His bride. What New Testament passages teach this?
7. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?

# Lesson 5

## God as Warrior

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1. Who are the great warriors of the Bible?
2. What claim is made about God in Exodus 15:3? What is the context of this passage?
3. How is the creation described in terms of mythological battle in the Psalms? See Psalms 74:12-15; 89:8-11
4. Consider the previous passages along with Job 26:12 and Isaiah 51:9. What can we learn about God from these highly poetic passages?
5. Use a Bible dictionary to define the word *herem* or “holy war.” This is the concept behind Israel’s destruction of Jericho.
6. Where does one most often find the phrase “Lord of hosts?” What does the phrase mean?
7. Though called to a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, Paul often uses what kind of language to describe our lives as Christians? (see Ephesians 6:10ff)
8. What do we learn from John’s visions of spiritual warfare in the book of Revelation?
9. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?





# Lesson 6

## God as Provider

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1. When Abraham went to offer Isaac on Mt. Moriah, what did Abraham call the place in Genesis 22:14?

2. On this same mountain, David would offer sacrifices that stopped a plague. Later Solomon would build the temple in the same vicinity. Almost one thousand years later Jesus died on the same mountain. How does Abraham's name for this place fit these events?



3. What is the reciprocity principle taught in the book of Proverbs?

4. How did God regularly provide for the Israelites?

5. What does James 1:17 teach us?

6. Why do we need to be careful with a passage like Romans 8:28?

7. Consider Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:5-15. What does God already know?

8. Make a list of the first 10 daily provision from God that come to your mind.

9. Consider a personal story or event to share in which God provided what you needed.

10. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?

# Lesson 7

## God as Farmer

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1. Make a list of Bible stories involving gardens, farms, and vineyards.
2. How are gardens often viewed in scripture? (i.e. Genesis 2; the Song of Solomon; Revelation 22)
3. What were the decorations on the curtains and walls of the Tabernacle and Temple?
4. What did God provide for the Israelites in the wilderness? What items did the Israelites desire from Egypt?
5. What does a farm require of the farmer? What does a farm require of God?
6. What was one of the curses God warns the people of if they disobey?
7. Consider Psalm 80:8-13; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 13:6-9. What do these parables teach us about God and His expectations of us?
8. Consider the vine of John 15, the olive tree of Romans 11, the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Why is this imagery so common in scripture?
9. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?



# Lesson 8

## God as Shepherd

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1. Make a list of shepherds in the Bible.
2. When thinking about shepherding in the Bible, where does your mind go?
3. What does the shepherd of Psalm 23 do? (see also Psalm 78:51-55)
4. What was God's complaint with the shepherds of Israel in Jeremiah 23:1-4 and Ezekiel 34:2-6?
5. Contrast the wicked shepherds with God in Isaiah 40:10-11, Jeremiah 3:15, and Ezekiel 34:11-16.
6. What two shepherd analogies does Jesus make in John 10?
7. How are elders described in 1 Peter 5:1-4?
8. How are we like sheep?
9. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?

# Lesson 9

## God as Physician

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1. Make a list of diseases healed in the Bible.



2. What do passages like Jeremiah 8:21-22, 30:12-15, and Hosea 5:13 teach us about sin?

3. Why is the Old Testament Law obsessively concerned with leprosy? How is leprosy like sin?

4. How do we know that sickness  $\neq$  sin?

5. Consider the lame man whom Jesus healed. With what aspect of the man's life was Jesus' most concerned?

6. Where did this disease of sin come from?

7. What is the cure for this disease? Consider Exodus 15:26; Psalm 103:1-5; 147:3; Isaiah 53:4; Jeremiah 33:6-7; Hosea 6:1; Matthew 8:17

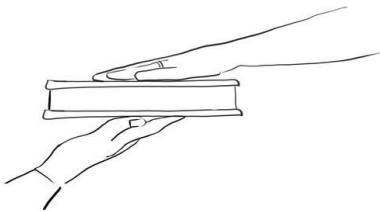
8. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?

# Lesson 10

## God as Promise Keeper

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1. What are promises that humans make and break on a regular basis?
2. Make a list of promises/oaths/covenants that God made throughout scripture?
3. Consider Psalms 105 and 106. How does God respond to His promises even when His people are not faithful?
4. Given that when God speaks, it creates reality and accomplishes His will (cf. Isaiah 55:11), what does Paul mean that God cannot lie in Titus 1:2?
5. Considering the promises God has made to us, what should His “track-record” create in us?



6. What does God expect of His people when it comes to oaths, vows, and promises?
7. Why is deceit so abominable to God?
8. Use a Bible dictionary to look up the Hebrew word *hesed*. What does this word mean and how is it usually translated?
9. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?

# Lesson 11

## God as Sovereign

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1. What does “sovereign” mean? What does it mean for a nation to be “sovereign”?
2. What Bible stories show that God is in complete control?
3. What passage discusses God as a King?
4. Read and consider Psalm 2:
  - Who is in control?
  - Who is rebelling? Why?
  - How does God respond?
  - What is the warning given to us in this Psalm?
5. What is the imagery and implication of Isaiah 64:8 and Jeremiah 18:1-11?
6. The book of Job ends with a stern lecture from God about His power, wisdom, and sovereignty. What was Job’s response?
7. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?



# Lesson 12

## God as Divine Patron

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1. Use a dictionary to define the terms “patron” and “client.”
2. There were many things in the ancient world that could not be bought by just anyone. You had to have a connection. This might include protection, advice, influence, or a simple favor. This was called patronage. And though the benefactor could not repay, the return of thanks was to be equal to the gift.
3. “Grace” was not really a religious word, but was used to speak of reciprocity. The patron would bestow grace or favor on someone. And that individual would respond with grace or gratitude. What do we mean when we refer to praying before a meal as “saying grace”?
4. We see a great example of the patronage system in Luke 7:2-10. Who is the patron? How is he being repaid?
5. Consider Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:
  - In what way is God our divine patron?
  - What grace or favor does He give us?
  - How else could we acquire these blessings?
  - How can we repay Him?
  - How do we reciprocate?
6. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?



# Lesson 13

## God as Judge

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1. What Bible stories or parables involve judges?
2. How might the role of a judge in our society differ from ancient society?
3. Use a concordance to search the word "judge." How many passages speak of God as judge?
4. Consider Revelation 20:11-15.



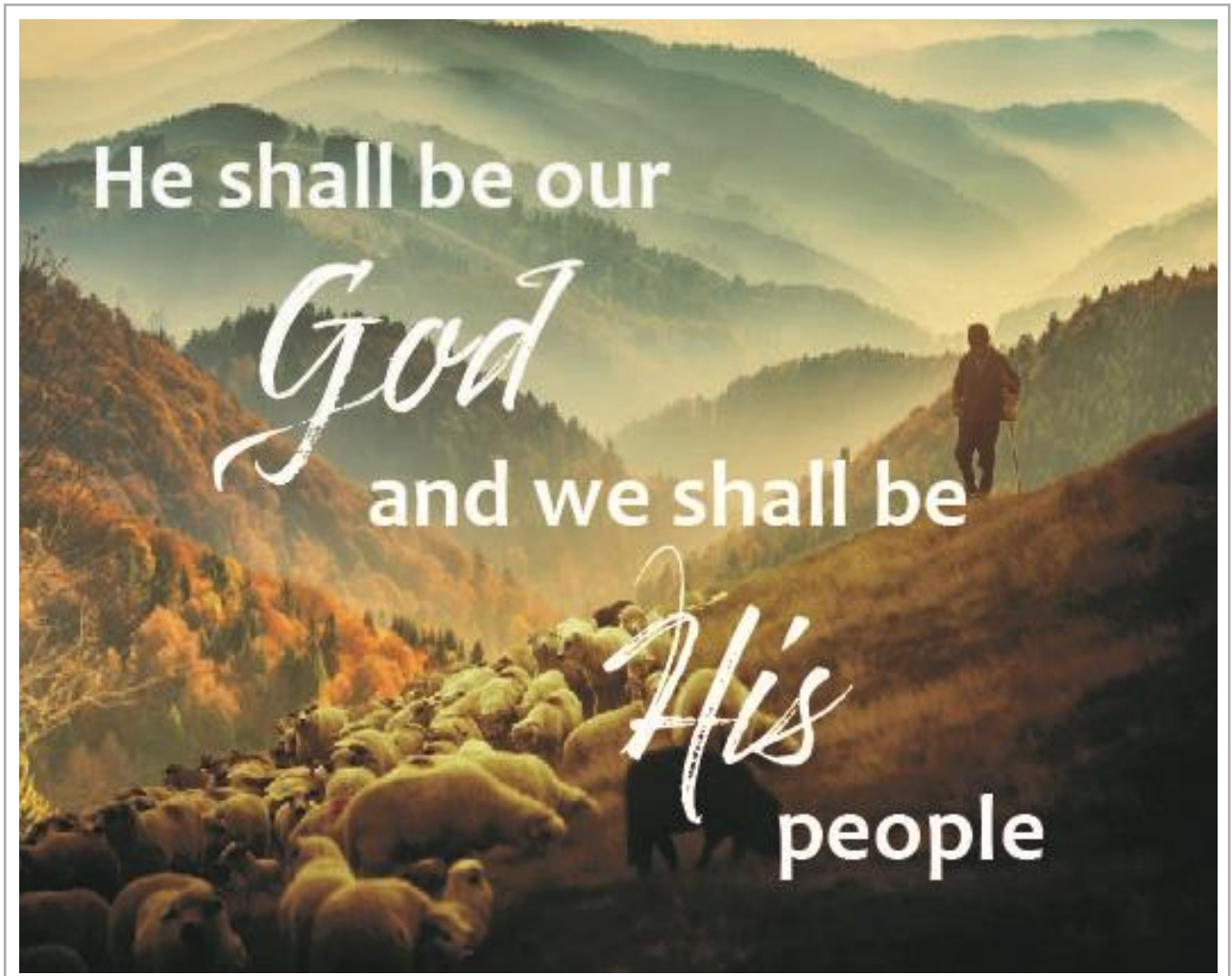
- Who is on the throne?
  - What is the standard for judgment?
  - Who will be judged?
  - What is the sentence for the guilty?
5. What is a mediator or advocate? Who does the New Testament acknowledge as our advocate?
  6. What does it mean for us that the mediator is the son of the judge?
  7. What does this portrait of God teach us? How can this understanding help us as children of our heavenly Father?



# OUR AWESOME GOD

The Nature and Character of Our Heavenly Father

Wednesday: A Study of God



Prepared by David Maxson

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2023

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# OUR AWESOME GOD

The Nature and Character of Our Heavenly Father

## Wednesdays: A Study of God

Date	Topic
Wednesday, January 4	1. Introduction
Wednesday, January 11	2. The Transcendent God
Wednesday, January 18	3. The Infinite God
Wednesday, January 25	4. The Trinity
Wednesday, February 1	5. The Unchanging God
Wednesday, February 8	6. God Only Wise
Wednesday, February 15	7. The Love of God
Wednesday, February 22	8. The Grace of God
Wednesday, March 1	9. The Wrath of God
Wednesday, March 8	10. The Jealous God
Wednesday, March 15	11. The Fear of God
Wednesday, March 22	12. The Sons of God
Wednesday, March 29	13. Review (no workbook lesson)

# Lesson 1

## Introduction

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### The Importance of this Study

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer)

Many think a study like this is academic. The study of the nature and character of God is for theologians not ordinary Christians. Nothing could be further from the truth! The study of God may be the most practical study there is.

Can you think of an area of biblical study that is not affected by our understanding of God? Our presuppositions about God determine the way we think about everything. A proper understanding of the nature and character of God is essential to right thinking about everything else.

#### *Worship.*

“A son honors his father,  
And a servant his master.  
If then I am the Father,  
Where is My honor?  
And if I am a Master,  
Where is My reverence?  
Says the LORD of hosts.”

Malachi 1:6

Why do people come to God with second best in worship? What has happened to make worship so irreverent? How is it that people offer unscriptural worship with no inhibition at all? Why is personal devotion such a struggle? These problems and more can be linked to a deficient understanding of God.

#### *Morality.*

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting...  
Romans 1:28

Bad theology leads to bad morality. The basic elements of right character and conduct are an imitation of the character of God (1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 Jn 4:8). Our pursuit of morality cannot be separated from our pursuit of God.

#### *Service.*

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:  
“Whom shall I send,  
And who will go for Us?”  
Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Isaiah 6:8

Why is it hard for people to serve God? Is it not because they have little knowledge of the Holy One? If more could see the King seated in glory as Isaiah did, we would surely hear more say, "Here am I! Send me."

These are but a few areas where an obvious connection between theology and our Christian life can be seen. The knowledge of God is so comprehensive and fundamental to our faith, it is no wonder that our Lord prayed, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (Jn. 17:3)

### **The Goal of Revelation**

What is the purpose of God's revelation to man? Is it simply a collection of rules? Is it a mere compilation of historical facts? Is it nothing more than an encyclopedia of great people who did great things (or of bad people who did bad things)?

The Bible is more than a "How to" book; much more than a list of do's and don'ts. It is a revelation of God Himself. Even the rules given communicate something of God, in that they are based on His character.

The Bible is more than mere history; essentially it is "His"-story. It is a revelation of God's works as He has fulfilled His eternal purpose. As we see how God's plan of redemption unfolds, we learn more than historical fact, we learn about a Person who is behind all history.

The Bible is more than a collection of heroes and villains, good guys and bad guys. It is a record of the otherworldly struggle between God and the Devil played out on the human stage. Mortals are involved in this struggle throughout, but the story is not primarily about them. As great as the heroes of faith are we must never lose perspective. The story is not about Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, or the apostles. It's about God. God is the hero of the Bible. As we see how God interacts with human characters in this struggle, we discover more about Him.

We make this point to say that the purpose of this study is not only to give a brief overview of the nature and characteristics of God (and we emphasize the words "brief" and "overview"), we also hope to reinforce the idea that the goal of all of our studies in the Word should be, at least in part, to come to a more perfect understanding of God. There is no way we can adequately describe God in thirteen lessons. We could not do it in twenty-six or fifty-two. This study is a lifelong endeavor, a mountain we climb endlessly until we are received up in glory and can finally see God in His fullness. The best we can do in this life is diligently search the scriptures to discover what God has revealed of Himself.. But this must be our objective if God's true nature and characteristics are to be found. So we hope that in this modest study we can at least introduce the many facets of God's nature and character to the end that we might develop a hunger to learn more of Him as we study from His Word.

## **The Importance of this Study**

- 1) Consider this quote from Tozer and give your impression of why his statement is true or not: *"Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, 'What comes to your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man."* Agree or disagree? Why or why not?
  
- 2) In the lesson we considered three areas which are directly influenced by our knowledge of God: worship, morality, and service.
  - a) Give more passages/reasoning's which demonstrate our point about those three areas.
  - b) List other areas of our spiritual life which are affected by our knowledge of God.
  
- 3) Psalm 50:21 *"You thought that I was altogether like you..."* List some of the ways that we remake God in our own image and thus distort His true character. In what ways is this practice similar to idolatry?

## **The Goal of Revelation**

- 4) Consider the following events from Genesis and explain briefly what each teaches us about God.
  - a) The Creation (Gen. 1).
  - b) The First Sin (Gen. 3).
  - c) The Flood (Gen. 6-9).
  - d) The Promises to Abraham (Gen. 12).
  - e) Abraham offers Isaac (Gen. 22).
  - f) Story of Joseph (Gen. 37-50).

# Lesson 2

## The Transcendent God

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### Transcendence Defined

The word *transcendence* comes from a Latin term which means “to climb over, to go beyond.” The word came to represent, however, that which could not be crossed over. If something is transcendent, it is something that is too great to transcend, too great to be surmounted. The word is used now almost exclusively in the sense of going beyond something, or an extension beyond the limits of something (summary of definition by Ray Anderson found in Cottrell’s book).

When this word is used in relation to God it speaks of His relation to His creation. Since He is the creator, by definition God transcends what He has made. God goes beyond the universe; He is separate from it. “This is the heart of the distinction between Creator and creature; no more basic statement about the nature of God can be made.” (Cottrell)

### God the Creator

The feature of God’s essence which makes Him completely transcendent is that God is the only uncreated being. 1 Timothy 6:16 says that God “alone has immortality.” Romans 1:23 condemns idolaters who forsake the incorruptible God to serve corruptible things. Verse 25 makes the distinction clear: “who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” The basis of God’s transcendence is this characterization of God as the Creator and all else as the creation.

### God is Holy

The term the Bible uses to describe the transcendence of the Creator over His creation is the word *holiness*.

In Scripture God is characteristically described as “the Holy One” (Hos. 11:9, 12), “the Holy One of Israel” (Psa. 71:22; Jer. 51:5; throughout Isaiah), the “holy God” (Isa. 5:16); and the one whose name is holy (Psa. 30:4; 97:12; 103:1; Mt. 6:9). “Holy is He” (Psa. 99:3, 5); “holy is the Lord our God” (Psa. 99:9). “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:3; see Rev. 4:8). (Cottrell)

The word most likely comes from a Hebrew root which meant “to cut, to separate” which gives the word *holy* the idea of separation.

When used of God the word has two connotations: God is holy with regard to His ethical character and God is holy with regard to His essence. The former connotation can be seen in passages such as Isa. 30:11; 17:7; Josh. 24:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:15-16. But the later connotation is the dominant and most basic sense in which the Bible presents God as holy.

Holiness is the Nature of God, that which distinguishes Him from everything else, the Transcendence of God in His very Nature, as the “Wholly Other.” Hence Holiness is not a quality which God possesses in common with other

beings; on the contrary, it is that which distinguishes Him clearly and absolutely from everything else. To be holy is the distinguishing mark peculiar to God alone: it is that which sets the Being of God apart from all other forms of being. (Brunner, quoted in Cottrell's book)

### The Exalted One

Another biblical theme that emphasizes transcendence is the *exaltation* of God.

The language of height dominates the biblical picture of God. God is described as dwelling in the highest heavens. He is called "God on high" (or God of height; Mic. 6:6). Isaiah said, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted" (Isa. 6:1); he is "the high and exalted One" (Isa. 57:15). "The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high" (Isa. 33:5). Moses said, "I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted" (Ex. 15:1). The Lord is called the "Highest One" (Dan. 7:18, 22, 25, 27), the "Most High" (Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8; Lk. 1:32, 35; Acts 7:48; and elsewhere), and the "Most High God" (Dan. 5:18, 21; Mk. 5:7; Acts 16:17). His dwelling place is said to be "in heaven" (1 Kings 8:30; Psa. 2:4; 115:3; 123:1; Mt. 6:9). "I dwell on a high and lofty place," says the Lord (Isa. 57:15). He is "in the highest" (Lk. 2:14). "The Lord's throne is in heaven" (Psa. 11:4). (Cottrell)

### God is Spirit

The transcendent element of God's essence is His uncreatedness. The aspect of His nature that we share in to some degree is God's spiritual nature. God is a Spirit (Jn. 4:24), and inasmuch as He created us in His image (Gen. 1:26-27) we share in this part of God's nature. Cottrell comments that,

since God is spirit, He is like angels and human spirits in that He is immaterial and personal, for instance. But since He is uncreated, these attributes apply to God in an infinite way and with implications we can only begin to understand.

### Transcendence Defined

- 1) What is the meaning of the word transcendence? How is it used in relation to God?

### God the Creator

- 2) What are the implications of the Creator/creature distinction with regard to:
  - a. Worship (Psa. 33:6-9; 95:6; Rev. 4:11).
  - b. Stewardship (Psa. 24:1-2; 50:10-11; 89:11).
  - c. Morality (Rom. 1:18-32).

## God is Holy/The Exalted One

- 3) When used of God, what are two connotations of the word *holy*? In which sense are we able to be holy (as God is)? What is the dominant sense in which the Bible presents God as holy? (Consider Ex. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; 29:23; Rev. 4:8; 15:4.)
  
- 4) In what sense is God exalted? Is this a geographic or special idea or is it figurative? Is God literally “above the heavens” or is this a description of God’s separateness from us?
  
- 5) Contrast the Bible picture of God as the holy God with the pagan understanding of deity. How did idolaters picture their gods? Did they see them as truly transcendent or simply as beings more powerful than themselves? What is the modern concept of God? Do most see God as absolutely transcendent or as merely a superior being? How would an accurate concept of God help to change the religious world? How would a more accurate concept of God change you and me?



# Lesson 3

## The Infinite God

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### Infinity Defined

When we describe God as *infinite* what do we mean? What we mean is that God is non-finite in His being. To be finite is to have limits. We, as human beings, are finite creatures. There is a limit to our knowledge, power, presence, and existence. God has no such limits on Himself. He is unlimited and unbounded in every conceivable way.

It is hard for us to conceive of an infinite being. If we're not careful we can come up with faulty definitions of what it means to be infinite. Cottrell clarifies what God's infinity is not:

This is not to be taken in a physical or mathematical sense, as if God were infinitely large or as if he extended infinitely into space. Nor does it refer to a merely quantitative distinction between God and His creatures, as if God and man have the same attributes except God has them to an infinite degree. An example of this would be that God and man have the same kind of knowledge; only man's is limited while God's is unlimited. To an extent this is true, but it is not the whole point or even the main point of infinity. To say that God is infinite means that He is not limited by anything outside Himself; He is not subject to the built-in limitations of created being. Finite beings, for instance, are by nature subject to certain restrictions of time and space; the infinite God is not.

There is what seems to be an apparent paradox in God's infinity when related to His creation. Creation both demonstrates God's limitless and boundless power and the limitations of God's power. God gave to His creation an independence from Himself inasmuch as He gave men and angels free will. In giving us free will God put a limitation on His own power. Cottrell said that God,

...committed Himself to respect the integrity of man's free will choices, and thereby placed Himself in the position of sometimes having to react to the actions of man, and of sometimes having to permit things to happen that He does not specifically desire. As Thiesen remarks, "That is why He did not keep sin out of the universe by a display of His power; that is also why He does not save anyone by force."

### A Paradox

Though this may seem to deny the infinity of God, really it doesn't, because the limitations placed on God's by creation are self-limitations. God is not limited by nature (as we are) but by choice. He did not have to create at all, nor did He have to include beings with free will in His creation.

### A Qualifying Attribute

Unlike the other attributes of God (holiness, love, justice, etc.), this attribute should be thought of as a qualifying attribute, since it qualifies all others. For example, God is holy; and His moral character is infinite in that it is not limited by any kind of moral defect,

weakness, or sin. God is love, and His love is not bounded by selfishness, ignorance of our needs, or an inability to help us. In every way is God infinite. In this lesson we'll examine some obvious ways in which God is infinite: in His existence (self-existent); with regard to time (eternal); with regard to space (omnipresent); with regard to knowledge (omniscient); and with regard to power (omnipotent).

### **Unlimited Existence**

- 1) God revealed Himself as "I AM" in Gen. 3:14. What are the implications of this name?
- 2) How do the following passages convey the idea of God's self-existence: Jn. 5:26; Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 6:16?
- 3) How do each of the following convey the idea of God's self-sufficiency: Acts 17:24-25; Rom. 11:34-35; Job 41:11; Isa. 43:12-13.

### **Unlimited with Regard to Time**

Time is a part of created reality; therefore, time is something God created, and as such it is something God transcends (along with the rest of His creation). God transcends time limitations. This is true in a *quantitative* sense and a *qualitative* sense.

- 4) Without Beginning or End: Psa. 90:2; 102:25-27; Jude 25; Rev. 4:8; Rev. 21:6; Isa. 44:6. What do these passages say about God's eternity in a *quantitative* sense?
- 5) Outside the Flow of Time: Isa. 41:21-26; 42:8-9; 44:6-8. 46:9-11; 48:3-7. What do these passages say about God's eternity in a *qualitative* sense?

### **Unlimited with Regard to Space**

Space, like time, is a product of creation. As created beings we are limited by space. We can only be in one place at a time. Only one material body can be in a given space at a time. To get from one place to another we must pass through the intervening space. But to God, the Creator, these limitations of space do not exist.

- 6) What are some of the implications of God's infinity with regard to space expressed in these passages? Acts 17:24-28; Jn. 4:20-24; Psa. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:23-24

### **Unlimited Knowledge**

- 7) This aspect of God's infinity is in part a natural consequence of the last two aspects. That God is not limited by space or time demands this conclusion. Why is this true? Heb. 4:13
- 8) Read Psa. 139 and suggest all the boundless dimensions of God's knowledge described in it.
- 9) What are some of the implications of God's limitless knowledge? Jer. 16:17; 2 Chron. 16:9.

## Unlimited Power

Theologians speak of God's *absolute* power and His *ordained* power. Absolute power is the unlimited reservoir of power by which God is able to do anything He could ever want to do, even if He chooses to not do it. Ordained power is the actual exercise of God's power by which He has brought about the things He has chosen to do.

- 10) What do these passages say about God's absolute power? Mt. 19:26; Lk. 1:37; Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17, 27; Job 42:1-2; Psa. 115:3. Do the following passages contradict this idea of God's absolute power? Tit. 1:2; Jas. 1:13; 1 Sam. 15:29.
  
- 11) How does the creation illustrate the ordained power of God (Rom. 1:20)? Do the imperfections in the present creation imply there are limits to God's power?

# Lesson 4

## The Trinity

*The article below and chart given on the next page are both taken from Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, [carm.org](http://carm.org)*

God is a trinity of persons: the Father, the Son, and the [Holy Spirit](#). The Father is not the same person as the Son; the Son is not the same person as the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is not the same person as Father. They are not three gods and not three beings. They are three distinct persons; yet, they are all the one God. Each has a will, can speak, can love, etc., and these are demonstrations of personhood. They are in absolute perfect harmony consisting of one substance. They are coeternal, coequal, and copowerful. If any one of the three were removed, there would be no God.

Jesus, the Son, is one person with two natures: Divine and Human. This is called the [Hypostatic Union](#). The [Holy Spirit](#) is also divine in nature and is self aware, the third person of the Trinity.

There is, though, an apparent separation of some functions among the members of the Godhead. For example, the Father chooses who will be saved ([Eph. 1:4](#)); the Son redeems them ([Eph. 1:7](#)); and the Holy Spirit seals them, ([Eph. 1:13](#)).

A further point of clarification is that God is not one person, the Father, with Jesus as a creation and the Holy Spirit is a force ([Jehovah's Witnesses](#)). Neither is He one person who took three consecutive forms, i.e., the Father, became the Son, who became the Holy Spirit. Nor is God the divine nature of the Son (where Jesus had a human nature perceived as the Son and a divine nature perceived as the Father ([Oneness theology](#))). Nor is the Trinity an office held by three separate Gods ([Mormonism](#)).

The word "person" is used to describe the three members of the Godhead because the word "person" is appropriate. A person is self aware, can speak, love, hate, say "you," "yours," "me," "mine," etc. Each of the three persons in the Trinity demonstrate these qualities.

The chart below should help you to see how the doctrine of the Trinity is systematically derived from Scripture. The list is not exhaustive, only illustrative.

The first step is to establish the biblical doctrine that there is only one God. Then, you find that each of the persons is called God, each creates, each was involved in Jesus' resurrection, each indwells, etc. Therefore, God is one, but the one God is in three simultaneous persons. Please note that the idea of a composite unity is not a foreign concept to the Bible; after all, man and wife become are said to be one flesh. The idea of a composite unity of persons is spoken of by God in Genesis ([Gen. 2:24](#)).

### There Is Only One God

The first step is to establish how many Gods exist: one! [Isaiah 43:10](#); [44:6,8](#); [45:5,14,18,21,22](#); [46:9](#); [47:8](#); [John 17:3](#); [1 Cor. 8:5-6](#); [Gal. 4:8-9](#)

- "I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God" ([Isaiah 45:5](#)).
- "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me," ([Isaiah 44:6](#)).

- "I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God, ([Isaiah 55:5](#)).

<b><u>THE TRINITY</u></b>			
	FATHER	SON	HOLY SPIRIT
Called God	Phil. 1:2	John 1:1,14; Col. 2:9	Acts 5:3-4
Creator	Isaiah 64:8	John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17	Job 33:4, 26:13
Resurrects	1 Thess. 1:10	John 2:19, 10:17	Rom. 8:11
Indwells	2 Cor. 6:16	Col. 1:27	John 14:17
Everywhere	1 Kings 8:27	Matt. 28:20	Psalm 139:7-10
All knowing	1 John 3:20	John 16:30; 21:17	1 Cor. 2:10-11
Sanctifies	1 Thess. 5:23	Heb. 2:11	1 Pet. 1:2
Life giver	Gen. 2:7; John 5:21	John 1:3; 5:21	2 Cor. 3:6,8
Fellowship	1 John 1:3	1 Cor. 1:9	2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1
Eternal	Psalm 90:2	Micah 5:1-2	Rom. 8:11; Heb. 9:14
A Will	Luke 22:42	Luke 22:42	1 Cor. 12:11
Speaks	Matt. 3:17; Luke 9:25	Luke 5:20; 7:48	Acts 8:29; 11:12; 13:2
Love	John 3:16	Eph. 5:25	Rom. 15:30
Searches the heart	Jer. 17:10	Rev. 2:23	1 Cor. 2:10
We belong to	John 17:9	John 17:6	...
Savior	1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10	2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:4; 3:6	...
We serve	Matt. 4:10	Col. 3:24	...
Believe in	John 14:1	John 14:1	...
Gives joy	...	John 15:11	John 14:7
Judges	John 8:50	John 5:21,30	...

Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is arrived at by looking at the whole of scripture, not in a single verse. It is the doctrine that there is only one God, not three, and that the one God exists in three persons: Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. An analogy would be time. Time is past, present, and future. But, there are not three times, only one.

### **Reports**

Research one of the following topics and be prepared to share with the class what you learn.

- 1) What is the trinity?
- 2) Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Oneness (or "Jesus Only") on the trinity.
- 3) Analogies used to describe the trinity (Time - past, present, and future; Marriage - two become one flesh). Explain the strengths and weaknesses of each. Explain the usefulness and limitations of human analogies when explaining the trinity.
- 4) Jesus' two natures.
- 5) Use of plural "us" by God in Gen. 1:26, 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8.

# Lesson 5

## The Unchanging God

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The world described for us in the Bible seems very foreign to us. We read about a near Eastern world as it was thousands of years ago. In this world we read about circumcision, animal sacrifice, temple worship, and various feast days associated with the temple. We hear prophets speak out against pagan practices and religion that are rooted in idolatry. We see Jesus doing miracles, arguing with the Jews, dying on a cross, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven. We read letters in the New Testament which address strange and unfamiliar errors which do not now exist.

It's all very interesting, but it also all seems very far away. When we read the Bible we feel as if we are visiting a strange world that has little to do with our life. The unspoken question is this, "What does all of that have to do with my life?" We sometimes have a hard time finding anything relevant for our lives today when visiting the ancient world of the Bible.

A common response to this question concerning the relevance of the Bible is to point to the fact that human nature has not really changed during the history of human existence. Though they lived in an agrarian culture and ours is a technological one we all act, react, and feel in much the same way to the world in which we live. Though our specific problems may be different, the principle roots of those problems are no different. The fundamental problems we wrestle with as humans are the same today as those that people struggled with thousands of years ago.

But a better way of looking at the relevance of the Bible is to see not only the fact that we have not changed, but to see that God has not changed - not even a little. God is the link that bridges the gap between these two very different worlds. The same God who created the world, sent the flood on Noah's generation, gave promises to Abraham and His descendants, sent prophets to denounce idolatry among His people, and finally sent His own Son to die for our sins; He is the same God we are dealing with today. He is the exact same God. He has not changed at all. So if we are to see any relevance in the Bible at all, we must begin with this great thought: our God does not change!

### God's Life Does Not Change

- 1) God is "from everlasting" (Ps 93:2), "the eternal King" (Jer. 10:10), "the incorruptible God" (Rom. 1:23), "who alone has immortality" (1 Tim. 6:16). What does this mean to us in a practical way? What does this fact do for us?
  
- 2) How does the unchangeableness of God's life contrast with our life (Ps 102:26-27)?

### **God's Character Does Not Change**

- 3) What does James mean when he says that with God there is "no variation or shadow of turning" with God (Jas. 1:17)? What is the point in relation to the context (Jas 1:13-18)?
  
- 4) How does this fact about God's nature contrast with us (Jas. 3:9-10)? In what ways do we change? How does this affect our relationships with each other? How does the unchanging nature of God's character affect our relationship with Him?

### **God's Truth Does Not Change**

- 5) What do we learn from the Bible about God's word (Isa. 40:6-8; Psa. 119:89, 151-152)?
  
- 6) What is the consequence with regard to God's promises, demands, statements of purpose, and words of warning as stated in the New Testament (Jn. 10:35)?
  
- 7) Contrast this fact about God's word and His truth with human laws and rules.

### **God's Purposes Do Not Change**

- 8) Read 1 Sam. 15:29 and Num. 23:19. What do these passages teach us about God's mind? Consider the context of each passage and explain what the point was behind each statement.
  
- 9) There are several passages which speak of God repenting or relenting (Gen. 6:6-7; 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam. 24:16; Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:13-14). Explain.
  
- 10) What are some reasons why our plans constantly change? What is it about God that guarantees that this won't ever happen?

# Lesson 6

## God Only Wise

*The following is taken from Jack Cottrell's book *The Faith Once for All*, pages 82-83*

Having power, even absolute power, is not necessarily a virtue if one does not know how to use it for good purposes. To do this, one must have wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to choose the best possible end, and then to choose the best possible means of achieving that end. That is, it is the ability to make the right decisions when judging between two different courses of action.

The Bible teaches that God is all-wise. He is "the only wise God" (Rom 16:27); "wisdom and power belong to Him" (Dan 2:20). "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways" (Rom 11:33). "He is mighty in strength of understanding" (Job 36:5; see Isa 40:14; Rom 11:34).

God's wisdom is manifested in His work of creation. "O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all" (Ps 104:24). "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens" (Prov 3:19; see 8:27-31). "It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom" (Jer 10:12).

God's wisdom is seen also in His works of providence, especially in His ability to use the forces of nature and the free decisions of human beings to carry out His purposes. This enables Him to bring good results out of bad circumstances, and to make us this promise: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). This gives us complete confidence in the wisdom of God. It indicates that God is not frustrated or thwarted by any contingency, either from sin-corrupted nature or from the evil hearts and hands of men. Even pain and suffering may be harnessed for good results by the all-wise Ruler.

God's wisdom is supremely made known in His works of redemption. Jesus Christ and His cross are "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24; see 2:7-9). The gospel proclaimed by the church demonstrates "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10).

If we truly believe God is wise, we will trust His purposes in creation; we will believe that a world with free-will creatures is the best possible world, even though such creatures have the ability to sin. If we believe that God is wise, we will not attempt to criticize or judge what He brings to pass or allows to happen, especially in view of Rom 8:28. Only someone who is wiser than God has a right to sit in judgment upon His providence.

The only wise response to an all-wise providence is complete trust in the God who makes all things work together for good. His wisdom, even more than His power, engenders such trust. If God were merely omnipotent, we would have more reason to be afraid of Him than to put our confidence in Him. But He is both powerful and wise (Dan 2:20). Packer says, "Wisdom without power would be pathetic, a broken reed; power without wisdom would be merely frightening; but in God boundless wisdom and endless power are united, and this makes Him utterly worthy of our fullest trust" (81).



## **Wisdom: God's and Ours**

- 1) How is wisdom defined in the lesson?
- 2) What are three ways God's wisdom is manifested (see lesson)?
- 3) What would be the consequence of having a transcendently powerful being who is not also transcendently wise?
- 4) What promise is made for us in Rom 8:28? What does the context of this verse suggest about the nature of the "good" promised to us?

## **God's Dealings With His People**

- 5) How did Jacob describe the days of his life to Pharaoh (Gen 47:9)? Can you think of some of the painful things that happened in Jacob's life? What were some of Jacob's character flaws? How did these painful things serve to correct some of these flaws (see Gen 32:25)?
- 6) List some of the bad things that happened to Joseph in his life. How did Joseph look back on these things in hindsight (Gen 45:7-8; 50:19-20)?

## **How to Find Wisdom**

- 7) What is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7)? How is that thought amplified and explained in Prov 3:5-6? Consider also Jer 10:23; Isa 55:8-9; Prov 11:2.
- 8) What is the key to receiving wisdom or insight according to Ps 119:98-99? See also Col 3:16.

## **Things God Does Not Reveal**

- 9) What theme runs through all these verses from Ecclesiastes: 3:11; 7:13-14; 8:17; 11:5? What happens to us when we ignore these words from Solomon (1:17-18)?
- 10) What does Solomon recommend instead of the vain pursuit listed above (11:1-6; 12:13)?

## **The Fruit of Wisdom**

- 11) What does wisdom produce (Jas. 3:17-18)?

# Lesson 7

## The Love of God

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“God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16). This is both one of the greatest statements about the character of God as well as one of the least understood. We’re told that since God is love He is not concerned about sin. We’re told that God is nothing more than a sentimental grandfatherly type; that God is not one who demands exact obedience, but passively and almost casually overlooks our transgressions.

But in the same book that we read, “God is love” we also read, “God is light,” and the force of that statement is brought out in the next clause, “and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn 1:5). Light here represents holiness and purity. John’s purpose was to clear up the misconception among some that it did not matter how you lived before God. John says that only those who walk in the light can truly claim fellowship with the Father, who is light (1 Jn 1:5-7).

The Bible presents God as a loving God full of mercy and patience, but it also presents God as a just God full of judgment and wrath against sin. When God revealed His glory (in part) to Moses He proclaimed His name saying,

“The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” (Ex 34:6-7)

To emphasize God’s mercy to the exclusion of His wrath (or vice versa) is to create in our minds a distorted image of God. The only way we can hope to grasp the character of God is to see both of these aspects as equally true and essential facets of God’s nature. Both serve as the motive behind everything He does. If either is left out when examining God’s actions we will misinterpret His work. For example, if we fail to see the divine love and the divine justice behind the cross, we’ll completely miss the meaning and significance of the cross. In fact, the cross makes no sense at all if we discount in our minds (much less leave out altogether) God’s mercy or wrath.

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God” (Rom 11:22). In the next we will focus on God’s wrath, but first, we want look at several passages to help define what John meant when he said, “God is love.”

We borrow Jack Cottrell’s definition in his book *The Faith Once for All*:

God’s love is his self-giving affection and selfless concern that lead Him to actively seek the happiness and well-being of His image-bearing creatures. (pg 91)

There are five elements to this definition which we will examine below.

## **God's Love Shows Concern**

God is genuinely interested in us and cares about us. He is not indifferent about His creation, but is concerned about our well-being.

- 1) What is so amazing about the fact that the Creator would care about His creation (Ps 8:3-4)?
- 2) How personal is this concern (Lk 15:10; Gal 2:20)? Is that fact hard to believe?

## **God's Love is Impartial**

God's love is not reserved only for a few (as the Calvinist would say). His love is for all those who bear His image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27; Acts 10:34-35).

- 3) Identify a few examples from the OT that would demonstrate God's impartial love.
- 4) Pick out a few examples from the ministry of Jesus that would illustrate this point.

## **God's Love is Self-Giving**

God will give of Himself in whatever way is necessary to bless us. He shares His power with us in the bounty of His creation. He shares Himself with us in communion and communication. But the ultimate example of this is seen in the cross. God came in the flesh so He might die for us. The Creator gave Himself for the creature.

- 5) After John states that "God is love" what does he say is the ultimate expression of that love (1 Jn 4:9-10)?
- 6) What does Paul conclude as necessarily true in light of God's sacrifice at the cross in Rom 8:32?

## **God's Love is Active**

God's love is active in many ways: in His providential blessings (Mt 5:43-48), in His chastisement (Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-6), and in the cross (Jn 3:16; 15:13).

- 7) How does Jesus describe God's active love (Mt 18:11-14)?
- 8) How does Paul describe God's active love (Eph 1:3-6)?

## **God's Love is Full of Affection**

God's love is passionate toward us. Consider some of the analogies describing God's relationship with His people: father to child (Hos 11:1, 4; Rom 8:15), mother to child (Isa 49:15; 66:13), husband to wife (Hos 3:1; Eph 5:25), and shepherd to flock (Ezek 34:11-22; Isa 40:11; Jn 10:11).

- 9) Read Deut 32:9-12. List the various ways God's affection for His people is described in this passage.
  
- 10) What should be our reaction to the thought of God's love for us (Isa 41:8-10; 43:1-4; 49:13-17; 62:4-5)?

# Lesson 8

## The Grace of God

*The following is taken from Jack Cottrell's book The Faith Once for All, pages 98-99*

Grace is the most extreme expression of God's love when it comes face to face with sin. Grace is God's willingness and desire to forgive and accept the sinner in spite of his sin, to give the sinner the very opposite of what he deserves.

To understand this, and to get the full impact of it, we must remember what sin means to the holy God—how it goes against everything that He is, how it violates His good and righteous will, how He hates it with a holy hatred, and how it is His very nature to consume it in wrath. Yet despite all this, in His infinite love He is still willing to receive rebellious sinners back unto Himself. He is not just *willing* to receive them, but lovingly *desires* to receive them and *seeks* them. This is His grace.

The basic meaning of the NT word for grace, *charis*, is "a gift that brings joy." It can refer to any kind of gift, including God's gifts of creation, His providential blessings, the gifts of the Spirit, and divine aid in general. Sometimes, though, it refers to *saving* grace, it reflects that aspect of God's nature that causes Him to desire the salvation of sinner and to go to whatever lengths are necessary to make this salvation possible. This is displayed most distinctly in God's willingness to forgive sins. See Exod 34:6-7; Num 14:17-20; Neh 9:17; Micah 7:18-20; Rom 3:24-26. As Ps 103:8-12 says,

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

In defining the essence of God's grace we may say that it includes three things. First, grace means *giving*. To say that God is gracious means that it is His nature to give of Himself and of His bounty to His creatures. Here is a basic difference between the two sides of God's nature. Grace is a form of love; and whereas holiness *demands*, love *gives*. In the context of sin, love-become-grace gives salvation. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23; see Rom 8:32). Because salvation comes to us by grace, it must be a gift, because the very essence of graciousness is to give.

Second, grace means *forgiving*. Being forgiven by one whom you have offended is the greatest gift that person can give you. When the one offended is the Holy God, and when the offense is sin against His holy law, then His forgiveness is the greatest imaginable gift. And this is exactly what the God of grace wants to give every sinner. Desiring to forgive those who have sinned against Him lies at the heart of God and at the heart of grace: "For you, LORD, are good, and ready to forgive" (Ps 86:5). Wherever the Bible speaks of forgiveness, it is speaking about grace.

Third, grace means "favor bestowed when wrath is owed" (a phrase I owe to Ranny Grady). The definition of saving grace as "unmerited favor" is much too weak, except perhaps in reference to gifts not having to do with salvation. Where salvation is concerned, the gift of eternal life is not simply unmerited or undeserved; it is the very *opposite* of what we deserve.

That God is gracious means that He is by nature willing to give us the very opposite of what we deserve, the very opposite of what His own holiness demands. As Packer puts it, "The grace of God is love freely shown towards guilty sinners, contrary to their merit and indeed in defiance to their demerit" (120).

In summary, God's graciousness is His infinite willingness and desire to give sinners the gift of forgiveness, even though they deserve His wrath, and even though it costs Him the cross.

### **No Grasp of Grace**

- 1) In Packer's book *Knowing God* he suggests four reasons why the average Christian fails to appreciate and properly understand grace. Look at the four reasons listed below and explain why this is so. If you can think of scripture to support your answer provide that. I've italicized the phrases Packer uses and given my own comments in parentheses.
  - a. *The moral ill-desert of man* (or how sinful we are).
  - b. *The retributive justice of God* (or God's wrath against sin).
  - c. *The spiritual impotence of man* (or our inability to save ourselves).
  - d. *The sovereign freedom of God* (or God's right to not save us).

### **Not Earned or Deserved**

- 2) Grace is the source or foundation of our forgiveness. Briefly summarize each passage below which makes this point. Can you think of other passages that prove this?
  - a. Romans 3:24-25
  - b. Ephesians 1:7
- 3) Grace is the motive for God reaching out to save us. As was stated in the lesson, grace is "favor bestowed when wrath is owed." God knew we would sin, but initiated a plan to save us anyway. How do the following passages make the point that grace is what motivated God to devise His plan to save us?
  - a. Ephesians 1:5, 9, 11; 2:4-8
  - b. Romans 8:29-30
- 4) Grace is not only the source of our forgiveness, it is the force which enables us to grow and mature in Christ. Grace is the reason for our security in Christ. Comment on the meaning of the passages below.
  - a. 1 Peter 1:5
  - b. Ephesians 3:14-21



# Lesson 9

## The Wrath of God

*The following is taken from Jack Cottrell's book The Faith Once for All, pages 94-95*

The wrath of God is not a pleasant subject to think about; but it is an essential part of God's nature, and a study of it is crucial for a proper understanding of sin and salvation. In its essence God's wrath is not different from his holiness, but is simply that into which holiness is transformed when confronted by sin (*GR*, 275-319).

The biblical witness to the wrath of God is overwhelming. God announces His wrath toward rebellious nations: "He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury" (Ps 2:5). Using the figure of a winepress God declares, "I also sprinkled on My garments... For the day of vengeance was in My heart" (Isa 63:3-4). Rebellious Israel did not escape God's wrath: "On this account the anger of the LORD has burned against His people, and He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down" (Isa 5:25). "For a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains" (Deut 32:22). None of God's enemies will escape: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18).

Leon Morris says that the OT alone has over twenty words expressing this concept in over 580 passages (*Preaching*, 131). Some of these OT words have the connotation of a hot, burning fire. For example, "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure [*chemah*] with which the LORD was wrathful against you" (Deut 9:19). "And when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled [*charon*], and the fire of the LORD burned among them" (Num 11:1). The most common OT word for God's wrath is '*ap*, which refers to the nose or nostrils; the verb form means "to snort, to be angry." Psalm 18:8 says that when God was angry, "smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it" (NIV).

The NT uses two basic terms for God's wrath. One is *orge* (John 3:36; Rom 1:18; Rev 6:16-17); the other is *thymos* (Rom 2:8; Rev 14:10, 19). If there is a difference between them, the former refers more to a constant and settled state of controlled indignation, like a volcanic fire that is constantly seething beneath the surface; and the latter refers more to a passionate outburst of wrath or a sudden upflowing of rage, like a volcano when it erupts. Thus God's wrath is a constantly burning indignation against all sin, but on specific occasions it bursts forth in acts of consuming judgment. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29).

It is important to see behind the specific outpourings of divine wrath and recognize that the burning fire of wrath is a constant aspect of God's nature, a part of His very essence. Because He is holy, it is impossible for God not to be wrathful in the presence of sin. Wrath is the natural and inevitable and eternal recoil of the all-holy God against all that is unholy. The holiness of God always burns against the very thought of sin, but this is not obvious and not observed until sin actually comes into existence. At that point the holiness of God is unveiled as a "consuming fire" that must by nature engulf and destroy the offending evil, just as a hot stove instantly vaporizes drops of water that fall on it. God's holy nature is like an oven that is constantly maintained at 451 degrees Fahrenheit, and sins are like bits of paper that spontaneously burst into flame when cast into that oven.



To be the object of God's wrath is described in the Bible as a horrible experience: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). Those under God's wrath are called His enemies (Rom 5:10; Col 1:21; Jas 4:4). "Behold, I am against you," He says to those under His wrath (Jer 50:31; Ezek 21:3). "The face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Pet 3:12).

Sometimes we hear that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. This is not true; God's hatred is directed against the *person* who sins and not just the sin itself. "You hate all who do iniquity... The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit" (Ps 5:5-6). "The one who loves violence His soul hates" (Psa 11:5). See also Lev 20:23; Deut 25:16; Ps 78:59; Prov 6:19; 11:20; 16:5; 17:15; Jer 12:8; Hos 9:15; Mal 1:3; Rom 9:13. We cannot ignore the force of these passages.

Basically God's wrath is *retribution*, a deserved punishment for sin. It is a judicial penalty justly inflicted upon the unrepentant sinner by God the righteous Judge. It is the curse prescribed by law; on the day of judgment Christ will say, "Depart from Me, accursed ones" (Matt 25:41). It is divine vengeance that repays the wrongdoer the just wages of his sin: "Vengeance is mine, and retribution," declares the LORD (Deut 32:35; see Heb 10:30). "A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; the LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies" (Nahum 1:2). The many biblical references to God's wrath as vengeance leave no doubt that it is a form of holy retribution upon those who deserve it.

### **What God's Wrath Is Like**

- 1) Some picture God's wrath as an irrational, uncontrolled outburst or as cruel. How is God's wrath pictured in the following passages:
  - a. Romans 2:5-6
  - b. Luke 12:47-48
  - c. John 3:18-19

### **Romans on Wrath**

- 2) *The meaning of God's wrath.* To what is God's wrath a response (Rom 1:18; 2:5-6; 5:9)?
- 3) *The revelation of God's wrath.* Is anyone totally ignorant of the need for and reality of a coming judgment (Rom 1:32)? What are some of the ways God's wrath is revealed to those who have never even heard the gospel (Rom 1:18, 24, 26, 28; 13:4-5)?
- 4) *The deliverance from God's wrath.* What is the only way to be saved from God's wrath (Rom 5:9; 3:24-25)?

# Lesson 10

## The Jealous God

*The following is taken from Jack Cottrell's book The Faith Once for All, pages 93-94*

The holiness of God when provoked by sin sometimes springs forth in the form of *jealousy* (GC, 409-416). In the second commandment Yahweh declares, "For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (Exod 20:5). "You shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exod 34:14).

Both the OT and the NT words for jealousy refer to an intense feeling of zeal or ardor, a fervor of spirit, a zealousness, a jealousy, even a jealous anger. But we must not think of God's jealousy as a petty spite or envy directed toward some other deity whose legitimate worshipers he covets. Rather, when jealousy is attributed to God, the background always seems to be His relationship with His people understood figuratively as a marriage relationship. Like a husband, God is jealous with a "godly jealousy" (2 Cor 11:2) for both the welfare of His spouse and for the maintenance of her exclusive devotion toward Himself. And what is the major threat to both? Idolatry! Thus the biblical references to God as a jealous God most often appear in a context condemning idolatry. This connection is seen in Exod 20:5 and Exod 34:14, cited above. See also Deut 6:14-15, "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the LORD your God... is a jealous God" (see Deut 4:22-24; 29:17-20). In Deut 32:21 the LORD declares, "They have made Me jealous with what is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their idols." See Josh 24:19-20; Ps 78:58; 1 Cor 10:22.

False gods provoke God to jealousy because they are rivals to His exclusive claim to Godhood and to His exclusive right to the devotion of His creatures. This is where the concept of the marriage relationship enters. Those who are led astray by false gods are being unfaithful to their rightful spouse; idol worshipers are guilty of spiritual adultery or harlotry. See Num 25:1-2; Jer 5:7; Ezek 16:17; 23:25-27. Just as any husband would be hurt and indignant because of his wife's unfaithfulness, the holy God is provoked to jealousy when His people go after other gods. The heart of this attribute is seen in Isa 42:8, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images." As the only true God, He declares, "I will be jealous for My holy name" (Ezek 39:25).

- 1) Exodus 34:14 says that God's name is Jealous. What is the significance behind God's very name being Jealous? What does that tell us about the relative importance of understanding this attribute of God?
  
- 2) Dealing with the fact of God being a jealous God is a puzzling. How can a vice in humans be a virtue in God? Consider the questions below.
  - a. Look up in a dictionary this word: *anthropomorphism*. In what way are the statements about God's jealousy an example of this? How can this

anthropomorphism of God be misunderstood like other ones given of Him in the Bible (God's repentance, wrath, laughter, etc.)?

- b. The following passages in Deuteronomy all refer to God as a jealous God (4:24; 6:15; 29:20; 32:16, 21). What else do all those passages have in common? What sin is being discussed in each case? What does this fact teach us about the nature of God's jealousy? In other words, why is God jealous for us and what is it that provokes Him to jealousy? (see also Ezek 8:3; 16:38, 42; 23:25)
- 3) What are the negative and positive consequences of this characteristic in God for His people?
    - a. Negative (Deut 6:14-15; Josh 24:19-20; Zeph 1:18)
    - b. Positive (Nahum 1:2; Ezek 36:5-7; Zeph 3:8)
  - 4) What is the ultimate purpose behind all of the actions described under question #3? Ezek 39:25 – What does this passage mean?
  - 5) Consider these two places where God's jealousy for us is presented in the New Testament. Explain the meaning of the passage and then apply it to our situation today.
    - a. 1 Cor 10:22 "Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?"
    - b. James 4:5 "Or do you think the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'?"
  - 6) Considering all we've learned, what should be the response to our jealous God?
    - a. As His people individually (Num 25:11, 13; 1 Kings 19:10, 14; John 2:17; 4:34; Acts 20:24; 2 Cor 7:11; Tit 2:14)
    - b. As one of His churches collectively (Rev 3:15-19)

# Lesson 11

## The Fear of God

The goal of this class has been to summarize the nature and attributes of God. We've looked at God as the Creator who, as such, is transcendently holy. We've examined God as the One who is infinite with regard to time and space and thus is unbounded in His power, knowledge, and being. We've viewed Him as the Triune God who is both One and three simultaneously. We've seen God as the unchanging, only wise, loving, gracious, wrathful, and jealous God who is worthy of our love. We've stressed the fact that we can't fully know God; He is incomprehensible, dwelling in unapproachable light. Yet He has graciously chosen to reveal His glory to us in different ways (creation, His word, and most significantly through His Son).

The question we come to now is this: *What is the basic response which God expects from us?* Having come to understand in some measure the glory and majesty of our great God, this question demands an answer. The answer is this: *The fear of God.* The goal of this lesson will be to define and explain what is the practical outworking of a true, biblical fear of God.

### Reverence and Awe

- 1) Read the quote below before you the questions that follow:

*If we know God we must know Him in the matchless glory of His transcendent majesty, and the only appropriate posture for us is prostration before Him in awe and reverence. To think otherwise is to deny the transcendent greatness of God, and that is infidelity. The pervasive emphasis of Scripture upon the fear of God as the determinative attitude of heart in both religion and ethics and as the characteristic mark of God's people is exactly what must have been if the Bible is consistent with itself. The doctrine of God could know nothing else... Our consciousness is not biblical unless it is conditioned by the fear of God. (John Murray, Principles of Conduct)*

- a. Murray says that knowing God depends upon our knowledge of His holiness and the reverence that is produced by that knowledge. What is God called in Gen 31:42, 53? Why is God described in this way (consider Isa 8:13; Jer 10:6-7)?
  - b. Murray says that the fear of God is the characteristic mark of God's people. Is that true? Consider how God's people are described (Gen 22:12; Job 1:1; Acts 9:31; 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26) and how the ungodly are described (Psa 36:1; Detu 25:18; Eccl 8:13; Jer 2:19).
- 2) How is the word *fear* used in these passages: Lev 19:3; 1 Pet 3:2; Eph 6:5; Isa 11:2-3.

3) Our fear of God is a response to what in these passages: Psa 33:6-9; 96:4; Ex 15:11 (note – in the bottom two passages the KJV translates the word “awesome” as “terrible” or “fearful”)

4) It’s imperative we understand what the fear of God is and what it is not. Consider the quotes below on what the fear of God is and then answer the questions that follow:

*[The fear of God] is the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures. (Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy)*

*The creature should bow the knee in reverence before the Holy God. This humble recognition of the infinite distance between God and man is the “fear of the Lord.” (Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God)*

- a. How do you explain the apparent contradiction in Ex 20:20? Does God want His people to fear Him or not?
- b. Several exhortations are given that we “fear not”: Gen 15:1; Isa 41:10; 43:1; 44:2; Mt 17:6-7; Lk 1:13, 30; Rev 1:17. Which kind of fear is this?
- c. Which kind of fear is described in 1 John 4:18? How does the thought in that passage square with passages like Mt 10:28; Heb 4:1; 10:27, 31?

### **To Serve and Obey**

- 5) How is it that the two exhortations in Ecclesiastes 12:13 go naturally hand in hand?
- 6) What kinds of emotions are produced by the fear of God toward evil (Prov 8:13; 16:6; Psa 112:1; 128:1)? What is the practical outcome of these emotional responses (2 Cor 7:1; 1 Pet 1:17)?

### **To Magnify and To Glorify**

- 7) How does the fear of the Lord (which we’ve defined as a sense of awe and wonder) naturally find its expression in worship (see 1 Chron 29:10-13; Neh 9:5-7; Isa 6:1-3; Rev 4)?
- 8) What was a common response to Jesus’ miracles (Lk 5:25-29; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15)?

"Is – is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – *the* Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

(C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, pg. 86)

# Lesson 12

## The Sons of God

Perhaps the most powerful chapter in J. I. Packer's book, *Knowing God*, is the nineteenth chapter entitled "Sons of God." In the introduction, he argues that sonship is not ever presented in the Bible as a universal blessing enjoyed by all mankind, but a gift which only a select few enjoy. In the Old Testament God was not the Father of all, but of His own people, the seed of Abraham (See Ex 4:22-23). In the New Testament we see God has a world vision, but He is still pictured as Father for those few who, having put their faith in Jesus Christ, have been adopted by God as His sons (Gal 3:26-29; 4:4-5; Eph 1:5; Jn 1:12-13; 14:6; 1 Jn 3:1-2).

Packer writes further about the significance of the concept of adoption in the New Testament:

You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God. (*Knowing God*, pg 201)

The aim of this lesson will be to explain why we believe the above paragraph is true.

### A New Relationship

Our relationship to God as sons is described in both John's Gospel and his first letter. Packer points out that the first blessing described in the Gospel of John is adoption (1:12) and the climax of the first resurrection appearance is Jesus' statement that He was ascending to "My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (20:17). Packer says,

"Central in John's first epistle are the thoughts of sonship as the supreme gift of God's love (1 Jn 3:1); of love to the Father (2:15; 5:1-3) and to one's Christian brothers and sisters (2:9-11; 3:10-17; 4:7, 21) as the ethic of sonship; of fellowship with God the Father as the privilege of sonship (2:13, 23-24); of righteousness and avoidance of sin as the evidence of sonship (2:29; 3:9-10; 5:18); and of seeing Jesus, and being like Him, as the hope of sonship (3:3)." (*Knowing God*, pg 204)

- 1) What aspects of God's relationship to Jesus as His Father do we also share with Him?
  - a. Jesus (Jn 4:34; 5:19; 6:38; 17:4). Us (1 Jn 5:1-3).
  - b. Jesus (Jn 5:20; 15:9-10). Us (Jn 16:27).
  - c. Jesus (Jn 8:29; 16:32). Us (1 Jn 1:3)
  - d. Jesus (5:22-23; 17:1). Us (Jn 12:26).

## **Adoption: The Highest Privilege**

- 2) Packer asserts that adoption is the highest privilege in the gospel, higher even than justification. Do you believe this is true? Explain.

## **Adoption: The Basis of Our Life**

Packer argues that our life as a Christian must be understood in light of our adoption as sons. He suggests that the idea of sonship is seen throughout Jesus' teaching on discipleship and that this is seen in particular in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7).

- 3) **Conduct.** How does the idea of sonship relate to the following passages regarding our conduct?
  - a. Mt 5:16
  - b. Mt 5:44-45, 48
  - c. Mt 6:1, 4, 6, 18
- 4) **Prayer.** The model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount begins "Our Father" (Mt 6:9) What are two ideas which follow when thinking of God as our Father when we pray to him?
  - a. Mt 6:7-8
  - b. Mt 7:7-11
- 5) **Faith.** What is the basis of our confidence in this life that all our physical needs will be supplied to us from God (Mt 6:25-33)?

## **Adoption: What It Shows Us**

- 6) Each of the passages below reveal to us a consequence of our adoption. Read each passage and briefly relate what each blessing is.
  - a. 1 Jn 3:1
  - b. Eph 1:4; 1 Jn 3:3
  - c. Heb 12:6-7, 11
  - d. Rom 8:16-17a; Gal 4:7
  - e. Rom 8:17b-19; Heb 2:10; 1 Jn 3:2
  - f. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6
  - g. Mt 5:8; Jn 17:24; 1 Thess 4:17; 1 Jn 3:2; Rev 22:4