

“Who Is This God We Worship?”
Theology – The Doctrine of God
Genesis 1:1

Who is this God we worship? If recent surveys are correct, most people believe in “God”, in some supreme being. But, what “God” do they believe in? Do they believe in “the God”, or a god, and what does *that* mean? Are we all kind of believing in the same “god”, but doing it different ways? Is there in fact a true “God”, and how would/could we know Him? Is there some objective standard, some quantitative and qualitative way in which “God” might be revealed, defined (if possible), or even known? Or, is the “knowledge” of God simply up for grabs?

The word “god” is one of the most widely used terms in our language. Whether it is done profanely or reverently, who or what are we appealing to? Is it just a word, just a tired and trite term, or is there some substance, some meaning to it?

A walk through the religion section of your local bookstore or library, or even a cautious search on the internet will reveal a smorgasbord of differing viewpoints on the existence and reality of God. Even within the realm of that which calls itself Christianity, you will find differing beliefs or theologies. Unfortunately, many, if not most people have *created* a god in their own image, according to their own desire and opinions; “god” in essence has then become a *created* being, fashioned according to and limited only by one’s imagination. Some think of God as a “pure mathematical mind”, as I’m told did Albert Einstein. There are others that see him only as a mysterious, superhuman person or force or energy. Some see him only as a cosmic bully or killjoy. Some see him only as a sentimental grandfather type. He might be the “big guy upstairs” to some, or perhaps a George Burns or Morgan Freeman type of character as portrayed by Hollywood. Others might refer to something like the Bible, but base their concept of God on only one or two of His attributes, such as love and/or mercy and/or forgiveness, to the neglect of all His other attributes.

Then, of course, there is quite a vocal and energetic minority that doesn’t believe in any God or Supreme Being at all; they’re called atheists, and even agnostics. It is very interesting that the Bible actually has something to say about that: “*The fool [unthinking person] has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*” (Psalm 53:1a)

Let us consider something very fundamental: If God truly “is”, then His existence and His nature do not depend upon what you or me or anyone else thinks about Him. I.e. what you and I think about God is ultimately irrelevant to His reality... It only has a direct bearing on whether or not we will spend eternity with Him in that place we refer to as Heaven.

If we are truly interested in *knowing* God (or truly believing in Him), then we must also be ready and willing to acknowledge that somewhere in this vast universe and age there is an absolute or true-truth in which He is revealed. We must also be intellectually honest to acknowledge that one cannot truly know God apart from how He reveals Himself. E.g. How could God be real if he were subject to whatever and whoever imagined or fantasized him as being; shouldn’t “God” be able to tell us who and what He is... isn’t that a part of what being “God” is all about in the first place?

As discussed in our previous doctrinal study, it is the Bible that has revealed and proven itself to be the standard of absolute or true-truth. It is from the Bible that we see and know God. There is simply no reality or truth about God that contradicts the Bible. God has in fact revealed Himself to us, and how this was done is summed up in (Hebrews 1:1-2).

I. Fantasy, Fiction, Wishful Thinking, and Outright Lies.

To the surprise of some, the Bible actually recognizes the “existence” of other gods. Consider the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, “*For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*”

Paul also discussed the "unknown god" recognized by the people of Athens (Acts 17). There are in fact numerous references to other "gods" throughout Scripture. In the biblical era idol worship was rampant. People worshipped gods represented by idols, if not the idols themselves. Isaiah wrote of the absurdity of this in Isaiah 44, particularly verses 10; 14-17. Also note: (Isaiah 37:18-19). [Today, we could talk about our worship of money and things - "He who dies with the most toys still dies!" - of power and prestige, self-worship...]

Over and over again, God reveals the fallacy and fraud of other so-called "gods" and false religions. Let's consider just a few false theologies regarding God:

A. Deism – God created all things and has subsequently forsaken it or has simply been uninvolved with His creation. (The religion of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin; Unitarian Church buys into some of this...)

B. Pantheism – God is in everything, and everything is God. Another version of this is animism, where a spirit or soul is given to inanimate things; such that there is a force or energy behind all life and matter. (Eastern Mysticism, much of the New Age religions, "Star Wars", some pagan native-American religions)

C. Polytheism – there are many gods. (Hinduism, most primitive religions)

D. Theism – A belief in the existence of a god that we can know by reason and revelation, but not by personal experience. (Islam)

D. Henotheism – Having one principle god, but adding or allowing for additional ones.

(Nebucdnezer of Babylon, Cyrus of Persia; it has many modern equivalents such as *adding Christianity* to our life-styles... "fire insurance".)

E. Atheism – There is NO God... Period! Man is the only "god". (Secular Humanism, Communism; e.g.: ACLU, People for the American Way, People United for the Separation of Church and State, etc.)

F. Agnosticism – You cannot be certain there is a God.

We could also mention numerous cults, Word of Faith theology, and more, all of which present a god that contradicts the Bible, or denies the objective reality of God.

II. Who and/or What is God? (John 4:22-24)

While no definition can fully and accurately express the true nature and essence of God, who is infinite, attempts have been made to define or describe God as revealed in His Word. "The Baptist Faith and Message" is a witness to our beliefs as Southern Baptists. Found in Article II is our doctrinal statement on "God". E.Y. Mullins, a leading SBC theologian, described God in these words: "God is the supreme personal Spirit; perfect in all His attributes; who is the source, support, and end of the universe; who guides it according to the wise, righteous, and loving purpose revealed in Jesus Christ; who indwells in all things by His Holy Spirit, seeking ever to transform them according to His own will and bring them to the goal of His kingdom."

III. God Revealed

Historically, there are two avenues through which God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself; General Revelation and Special Revelation. Special Revelation is God's revelation of Himself through the Bible (See "The Doctrine of the Bible"). General Revelation, on the other hand, includes all that God has revealed in the world around us, including man. It is often called natural theology. Important Point: General Revelation can never ever contradict Special Revelation – The Bible. Taken further, there is no "revelation" of God that contradicts the Bible. Regarding Special Revelation, the Bible does not argue the existence of God; it declares His person, will, and purpose (e.g. Psalm 19:7-9). In regards to General Revelation, however, there are at least four naturalistic or philosophical arguments for the existence of God:

1. Cosmological – or "through creation". Simply stated, this line of evidence points out the universe around us is an effect which connotes or implies an adequate cause. I.e. something caused what we see around us. This line of evidence depends on three presuppositions: a) Every effect has a cause; b) the effect caused depends on the cause for its existence; and c) nature cannot originate itself. The only sufficient cause for Creation is a Creator – God (Psalm 19:1).

2. Teleological – or "through organization". The purpose, order and design of the universe calls for a designer; e.g. because there is a watch, there must be watchmaker. There is an observable purpose

in the universe which argues for the existence of God as its designer. [Metronome – something/someone had to start it]

3. Anthropological – or “through man”; the moral argument. How can man, a moral, intelligent, and living being, be explained apart from a moral, intelligent, and living Creator - God? E.g. our conscience. (Romans 1:18-20)

4. Ontological – Based on the philosophy or study of “being”, this argument simply states that because man has always thought of God, therefore, He must exist.

In and of themselves, none of these arguments “prove” the existent of the true God. Arguably, all four of these arguments may point someone to what has been popularly ascribed, an “intelligent designer”. The theory of “Intelligent Design” does not necessarily hold to the God of the Bible as the “designer”. Posed with the scientific and philosophical likelihood of an “Intelligent Designer”, however, one must then seek the **truth** of who He is. As we have already discovered in our doctrinal studies, consistent, absolute or true-truth is found only in Scripture, and it is there that we not only find Him, but also find that He longs for us to know Him.

IV. Attributes of God

Again, who is this God we worship? Who is this God we’re told to trust in? If you really, really want to know someone, I believe all of us should agree that it helps to know something about their character, their qualities, or their attributes. In a manner of speaking, this is also how we can know our God. To understand, to know God, we need to know something about His character or His attributes. An attribute is a property intrinsic to its subject and by which the subject is distinguished or identified.

In (Exodus 3:12-15) God introduces Himself as “I AM”; not “I was” or “I will be”; or “I’m thinking on it”... or “working on it”... or “whatever you want me to be”... He says He’s “I AM”. In answer to the “who, what, when, where, why, and how”, we have a simple and profound response of “I AM”. In this name for God, we see the revelation of His self-existence and eternity.

A. God is Eternal or Infinite (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 44:6; 2 Peter 3:8). One of the most often asked questions children (and even adults) ask about God is, “Where did God come from?” God has no beginning or end as we could understand it; God always was, and always is... He is “I AM”. The attribute of eternity means that God exists endlessly. What’s more, it also means that past, present and future are equally known to Him. God is a being who is free from limitations and boundaries, yet is absolutely perfect.

B. God is Self-Existent (Exodus 3:13-15; Psalm 115:3). One of the names of God is *YHWY* or *Jehovah* – *LORD*, and it literally means self-existence or eternal. God does not need anything outside of His divine self, and is totally independent of all creatures (including man). In fact, all creatures depend on God to exist.

C. God is Omnipotent (Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37). The word “omni” means “all”. The word “potent” means “powerful”. Thus, “omnipotence” means that God is all powerful and able to do anything consistent with His own nature, character and purpose. God is limited only by His moral character! Note: The word “almighty” appears 56 times in the Bible, and is used only of God.

D. God is Omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-12; Hebrews 13:5). This means God is everywhere present with His whole being at all times. As someone put it, “It’s not so much that God is everywhere as that God is the everywhere itself.” Note: This differs from “pantheism”, in that pantheism fails to distinguish the Creator from the created, something made clear in Genesis 1:1.

E. God is Omniscient (Psalm 147:5; 1 John 3:20). This means that there is nothing knowable that God is not aware of. He has perfect understanding of all things. A.W. Tozer put it this way, “God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all

desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.

"Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything. He is never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything nor (except when drawing men out for their own good) does He seek information or ask questions." (From, *The Knowledge of the Holy*)

F. God is Immutable (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 33:11; Hebrews 13:8). Have you ever wondered what would happen if God had a bad day, took the day off, or "got up on the wrong side of the bed"? Not to worry, this attribute means that God is forever unchangeable in character or attributes and also with divine purposes and promises. This doesn't mean that God is immobile or inactive, but it does mean that He is never inconsistent or growing or developing.

Regarding this attribute, some see inconsistencies or contradictions, such as in Genesis 6:6, Exodus 32:14, and Jonah 3:10, where God "repented" (KJV), or "relented" or was "sorry" (NKJV). Are there... contradictions here? No. From a human viewpoint it seems as though God "changes His mind". We should, however, look at these words in the context of threats or warnings, of which God gave ample mention of throughout the Bible, especially the OT. For example, throughout the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah God gave warning after warning of impending judgment, but also He offered ways out of the coming judgment if only His people would repent. They didn't, and judgment happened.

G. God is Spirit (John 4:24; Hosea 11:9). This means that God is invisible as opposed to the physical or material nature of man. What this also means is that man cannot comprehend the invisible God apart from God's self-revelation of Himself through His Word and Incarnation (Christ - Emmanuel).

H. God is Love (1 John 4:8-11, 16; John 3:16). E.Y. Mullins, SBC theologian wrote: "Love may be defined as the self-imparting quality in the divine nature which leads God to seek the highest good and the most complete possession of His creatures. Love in its highest form is a relation between intelligent, moral, and free beings. God's love to man seeks to awaken a responsive love of man to God. In its final form, love between God and man will mean their complete and unrestrained self-giving to each other, and the complete possession of each by the other." God's love is *agape* love.

I. God is Holy (Psalm 99:9; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 15:4; Habakkuk 1:13). This means that God is separate from all that is unclean, sinful, and evil; and that He is positively pure and thus distinct, separate, and independent from all of His fallen creation. Note: A proper view of the holiness of God should make one sensitive to their own sin.

J. God is Just and Righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4; Revelation 15:3; Acts 10:34). Though related to holiness, this attribute speaks to God's self-affirmation on behalf of the right as opposed to the wrong, both of which, like the other attributes, are also fully defined by and exemplified in Him (i.e. we fallible humans do not determine what is "just" and "righteous"). This also refers to God's moral equity in that He is impartial in all of His dealings and all of His works.

K. God is Intimate (Hebrews 4:14-16; Psalm 103:10-14; Romans 8:15). God is a personal God, the believer's Heavenly Father and Daddy, and He wants us to know Him.

While this is not a conclusive list of the attributes of God, for this study we will end with....

L. God Has Revealed Himself to us in the Person of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15; John 14:6-12). We will be looking at the Doctrine of Christ in our next study.

Conclusion: Do you believe in God? Good... But who is the God you claim to believe in... the God you claim to worship? Is He the God of His Word... or is he the god of your imagination? For too many a Christian, God is little more than a 911 connection. For others, He's not all that He should be... and is often relegated to a "box" or a narrow or limited view of who and what He truly is. I heard it said that, "God really is God; He's not just applying for the job." It should also be pointed out that, "God is God, and you're not Him".

One of the most amazing truths is that God loves us and truly wants us to know Him, but to do that we must know Him where He has revealed Himself... His Word. Do you know Him? Do you *really*???