

LESSON 3

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD

In the next two lessons, we will look at the most important topic of the nature and the character of God. You probably have not thought much about this except you know there is a God who created all things and, that he sent Jesus his Son into the world to reconcile you to himself through Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross. This already demonstrates two key points about God: (1) God has to be an extraordinarily and incomprehensibly powerful and intelligent being and (2) he must be loving beyond measure and a Person to experience a remarkable relationship with.

In becoming a Christian, therefore, you have already accepted certain truths about the nature and character of God, which God has revealed to you. This is a huge topic and vastly important for a new Christian, and in this lesson we are going to examine three core elements: the attributes of God, the Trinity and the character of God:

*"This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: **that he understands and knows me**, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD."*

Jeremiah 9:23-24

The Attributes of God

Most people in the world deny the evidence of the incredible power of God although it is right in front of them. Romans 1:20 says *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities —*

his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” When we look at the world and consider its creation we identify the essential attributes of God:

1. He is **eternal** – the world is finite and has a beginning. But God is infinite and has always existed. Genesis 21:33 calls God “...*the Eternal God*”.
2. He is **all-powerful** – in the composition and variety of life on the earth and the vastness and awesomeness of the whole universe we recognise the unlimited power of God. Jeremiah 10:12 declares: “...*God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.*” This leads us to the next attribute:
3. He is **all-knowing** – God possesses knowledge and wisdom that to us is incomprehensible. We can learn things about nature but the mind that created that nature in the first place is beyond measure or comparison. Moreover, God knows the future before it happens. Isaiah 42:8-9 says “*I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.*”
4. He is **everywhere-present** – being infinite, God is not limited by time or space, therefore, his Presence fills the universe. However, his essence is *not* in everything or every person, he is separate and distinct from his creation. Psalm 139:8-12 says:

"If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."

The Trinity

The foundational truth of Christianity is that there is one God, who is revealed to us as a Godhead composed of three Persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - called the Trinity. Unbelievers and members of false religions generally regard this to be a complete fallacy - they just can't understand it. It is something, however, that is revealed to genuine followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus said:

"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

(Luke 10:22)

The Bible sets out this extraordinary composition of God, that there is unity and yet diversity. The Persons of the Godhead are not three gods; rather, they dwell in perfect harmony with each other as they exist as the divine Being. God has therefore always existed as a community and we may experience each Person as we walk in relationship with God.

Although the actual word "Trinity" is absent from Scripture, the concept of the Trinity is found right throughout the Bible. So, we

use the word Trinity as a summary expression of the truth about the nature of God.

- There are many verses that declare that there is **only one God**: 2 Samuel 7:22 *"How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you"* (also Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah. 44:6; 1 Timothy. 1:17).
- There are numerous passages which demonstrate the **deity of the Father** i.e. that God is Father: Jude 1 *"To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father..."* (also John 6:27, Titus 1:4).
- Next, we have many verses which prove the **deity of Jesus Christ, the Son**—passages like John 1:1 *"the word was God"*, John 8:58 *"before Abraham was born, I am"*, Colossians 2:9 *"in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form"*, Hebrews 1:3 *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of his being"*, Titus 2:13 *"our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ"*.

Jesus willingly received worship from people and God alone is to be worshipped (Luke 24:52; John 9:38, 20:28).

Jesus called God his Father and acknowledged himself to be "the Son of God" this made him equal to God, and he was accordingly charged by the Jewish religious authorities with blasphemy which carried a death penalty and it is for this reason they wanted him crucified (John 5:18; Mark 2:7).

- Then we have similar texts which establish the **deity of the Holy Spirit**, calling him an *“eternal Spirit”* (Hebrews 9:14) and using *“God”* interchangeably with the *“Holy Spirit”* (1Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; Acts 5:3-4).
- One of the key ways the Bible communicates the concept of the Trinity is the numerous times the plurality of the persons in the Godhead is expressed (while maintaining their perfect unity). In Genesis 1:1, *“In the beginning God...”*, the Hebrew word for God (*‘elohiym*) is in its *plural* form not its *singular* form (*‘elowahh*). And yet when the Bible uses a personal pronoun for God such as ‘he’ or ‘him’ it is always *singular* not *plural*, i.e. never ‘they’.
- And in Genesis 1:26 God addresses himself as *“us”* not *“I”*: *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...”* (Also Psalm 2:7; Daniel 7.) Many verses speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the same context, thereby declaring the equality and distinction of each Person: Matthew 28:19 *“...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* (Also, Galatians 4:6; 1Corinthians 12:4-6; 1Peter 1:1-2; 2Corinthians 2:21-22; 13:14; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:18, 20-22; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; 6:10-18.)

Belief in the Trinity is absolutely necessary and any deviation will lead into heresy, false teaching and, when organized, a religious cult – for example, Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses, (see Appendix at the end of the Lesson, **Summary of Mormon & Jehovah Witness Teaching Compared with the Bible.**)

- *The Trinity matters for creation.*

In creation, the eternal Godhead acted together, in and through himself – God (the Father), spoke the “Word” (who is the Son), as the Spirit hovered over the waters of the unformed earth. And he chose to create a special being (Adam) that was like him in order for that being to walk in a harmonious, eternal relationship. Moreover, God is distinct from creation and contrary to fashionable New Age teaching is not in everything and everyone.

- *The Trinity matters for regeneration (i.e. to be born-again)*

When we are born again, God the Father makes us his child through the Word (the Son) and by the power and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. All three Persons of the Godhead are present and active when a person becomes a Christian. It is an incredible life-altering experience with eternal consequences. God permits us – an undeserving sinner now made righteous through Jesus and born of his Spirit - to be joined to him and become a member of his family (though as a lesser being – we are made like God but not equal to God). He unites himself with us making our heart his home (John 14:23), and so our bodies are described as a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1Corinthians 6:19).

- *The Trinity matters for how we understand our place in the world.*

The two main rivals to a Christian worldview at present are Islam and Postmodernism. Islam emphasizes the oneness of Allah and therefore unity—unity of (shariah) law and culture. Postmodernism, on the other hand, emphasizes diversity—diversity of opinion, belief, and culture—and denies that there is universal truth. True Christianity, with its understanding of God as three in one, allows for diversity and unity. If God exists in three distinct Persons who all share the same essence, then it must be possible

for God's creation to exhibit stunning variety and individuality while still holding together in a genuine oneness; but only if we all were to submit to him as the sole authority.

- *The Trinity matters for relationships.*

We worship a God who is in a constant and eternal relationship of community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is only with a Trinitarian God – a Godhead of community - that love can be an eternal quality of God. Without a plurality of Persons in the Godhead, we would be forced to think that God created humans so that he might show love and know love, thereby making love a created thing (and God a needy deity). But with a biblical understanding of the Trinity we can say that God did not create in order to be loved, but rather, created out of the overflow of the perfect love that had always existed among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whoever live in perfect and mutual relationship and delight. And is completely self-sufficient in and of himself, needing no-one or nothing to sustain him.

The Character of God

The character of God can be summarized in two respects, he is holy and he is love. (We will look further into the character of God in Lesson 4 "The Father Heart of God").

The Holiness of God

The Bible emphasizes that God is holy. That means in essence he is good, righteous and perfect:

- *"There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." 1 Samuel 2:2*

- *“But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.” Isaiah 5:16*
- *“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” Deuteronomy 32:4*
- *“The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread...” Isaiah 8:13*

We are to fear God in the sense that we will have to give an account to him of the way that we have lived. Because he is the Maker of all people he is the Judge of all, and the standard he uses (the law) is based upon his goodness, his holiness. And he has set the rule that we must be holy, as he is holy:

- *“There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy.” James 4:12*
- *“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:31*
- *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”” 1 Peter 1:15-16*

We all have an innate sense of justice i.e. right and wrong. This has been placed in our hearts by God and is often referred to as our conscience. Most people attempt to justify themselves and convince themselves that they are good. So, they try to silence

their conscience. But the standard they are using is their own. They are not measuring themselves by God's standard. And it is his standard of holiness by which they will be judged on judgement day.

When we look into the Law of God, summarized in the Ten Commandments, everyone is found to be a law-breaker. (See Lesson 1 – The Goodness Test.) Therefore, everyone is a sinner as the Bible declares:

- *"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3:22-23*
- *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:10-18*

The consequences of not meeting God's standard of holiness are spiritual death – separation from God both in this life and for all of eternity.

- *"...the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23*
- *"Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.... the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile,*

the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” Revelation 20:14-15, 21:8

It is impossible for us to meet God’s standard of holiness on our own because we possess a sin nature. Even though we wrestle against sin we are incapable of defeating it – unless we are born-again. The only solution is for our hearts to be made holy through the power of the Holy Spirit in the new (spiritual) birth. Only then can we fulfil the righteous requirements of God’s law, and it is revealed in how we live. No longer as slaves to sin, but as slaves of righteousness.

- *“...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10:10*
- *“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin ...when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves , you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin , which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness ... thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” Romans 6:6, 16-18*

The Love of God

The Bible also emphasizes that *“God is love”* (1 John 4:16).

However, it is important to define love the way the Bible does. The New Testament is written in Greek, and the Greeks used three words for love: *eros* meaning physical love, *phileo* meaning mateship or friendship love, and *agape* meaning self-sacrificing love. *Agape* is the word only and always used in relation to God:

- *“For God so loved (agape) the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16*
- *“But God demonstrates his own love (agape) for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8*
- *“This is how we know what love (agape) is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” 1 John 3:16*

This kind of love is full of grace (which means undeserved favour granted to others) and mercy. The Bible often talks about this amazing grace and mercy of God:

- *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...” Ephesians 2:8*
- *“Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.” Psalms 69:16*
- *“For the LORD your God is a merciful God...” Deuteronomy 4:31*

And just as we are to reflect the holiness of God, so too are we to exhibit the love of God:

- *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” 1 John 4:7-12*

The wonderful thing is that when we become a Christian, God puts his love into our hearts, so we can love others as he loves:

- *“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” Romans 5:5*

Finally, the Bible explains this kind of love in the following way:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13

Appendix to Lesson 3

SUMMARY OF MORMON AND JEHOVAH WITNESSES TEACHING COMPARED WITH THE BIBLE

Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be Christian religions, but they both believe doctrines which are completely contrary to the Bible. They teach a false Jesus and a false gospel.

Mormons teach:

- God used to be a man on another planet and Mormon members may become gods of their own worlds.[1]
- There are therefore many many gods.[2]
- The Trinity is three separate and distinct gods.[3]
- Entrance into celestial heaven is by the consent of God and the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith.[4]
- God has a body of flesh and bones.[5]
- God is married and produces spirit babies by having physical relations with his many goddess wives.[6]
- Jesus, Satan, and all of us are spirit brothers and sisters procreated in a pre-existent spirit life.[7]
- God himself had physical relations with Mary to make Jesus' body.[8]
- You must shed your own blood for the forgiveness of some sins.[9]
- Good works are necessary for the forgiveness of sins.[10]

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach:

- Their church organization is the prophet of God.[11]
- Jesus returned invisibly in 1914.[12]
- Blood transfusions are sinful. [13]
- The Holy Spirit is God's impersonal active force.[14]
- Only their church members will be saved.[15]

- Jesus was an angel who became a man.[16]
- Jesus did not rise from the dead physically.[17]
- There is no Trinity.[18]
- Good works are necessary for the forgiveness of sins.[19]

The Bible teaches:

- There is only one God who is a Triune Being.[20]
- God is spirit.[21]
- Jesus' sacrifice cleanses from all sin.[22]
- Jesus is the only way to God.[23]
- Only those who receive Jesus as their Saviour will be saved.[24]
- Jesus is God in the flesh (supernaturally created in Mary's womb)[25]
- Jesus died physically and rose again in the same body.[26]

The true Christian church has always believed only what the Bible teaches – without anything added to it. These two cults distort the truth by adding other teachings to the Bible. These groups are non-Christian cults because they deny the true biblical doctrines of Jesus and salvation.

First, Mormonism says Jesus is the brother of the Devil. And J,W.'s teach that he is an angel who became a man. These teachings are not biblical.

Second, both these cults falsely claim that in order to be saved you must do 'good works' (as they define them). The Bible says that salvation is a free gift from God.[27] The Bible condemns the addition of our works to the finished sacrifice of Jesus.[28] Galatians 2:21 says that if salvation comes by works then Jesus died needlessly. Salvation comes by God's grace through faith alone, not

by our 'good' works, which are worthless.[29] Simply put, they both preach a false message of salvation.

The Mormons and J.W.s maybe well-intentioned people but, they are misled.[30] They do not know that the true gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for our sins and that we receive his forgiveness by faith alone (faith in the true Jesus). Satan has blinded them. Jesus said that if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the pit.[31] Thus these two groups are tragically leading many into hell. Why? Because...only the Jesus of the Bible saves, not the brother of Satan (Mormons), not an angel made into a man (Jehovah's Witnesses). Genuine faith for salvation must be placed only on someone who is true and trustworthy, not in someone who is false and mythical.

If you want to be assured of the forgiveness of your sins and have peace with God then you must realize that you have sinned against God[32] and are separated from him.[33] Then, repent of your sin and turn to God with all your heart. Ask him to forgive you of your sins and save you; and receive Jesus into your life and be born-again; and live a, a life that is holy and righteous, in covenant relationship with God.

Appendix Footnotes

[1] Mormon Doctrine by Bruce McConkie. p. 321

[2] Ibid., p. 163

[3] Ibid., p. 319

[4] Brigham -Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 7, p289

[5] Doctrine and Covenants 130:22

[6] McConkie, p. 516

- [7] Ibid., pp. 192; 589
- [8] Ibid., pp. 741-742; The Seer, p. 158
- [9] Doctrines of Salvation by Joseph Smith, Vol. I p. 135
- [10] Articles of Faith p. 79
- [11] The Watchtower, April 1, 1972, pp.197, 200
- [12] You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth, 1982, p. 147
- [13] Reasoning from the Scriptures, pp 10-76
- [14] Holy Spirit, 1976, p. 11
- [15] Ibid., Feb. 15. 1979, p. 30
- [16] Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 1152; New Heavens and New Earth, p. 30
- [17] You Can Live Forever...pp. 143, 144, 172
- [18] Let God be True, p. 101
- [19] Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. I pp. 150, 152
- [20] Isaiah 43:10; 44:6, 8
- [21] John 4:24
- [22] 1 John1:7, 2:2
- [23] John 14:6
- [24] John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10
- [25] John 1:1,14, 8:58, 10:30; Colossians 2:9
- [26] Luke 24:39; John 2:19-21
- [27] Romans 6:23; 3:28; 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9
- [28] Galatians 3:1-2; 5:1-4
- [29] Isaiah 64:6
- [30] 2 Corinthians 4:3-4
- [31] Luke 6:39
- [32] Romans 3:23, 5:12
- [33] Isaiah 59:2