

# WHAT WE BELIEVE

## A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

### LESSON #7 – THE NATURE AND WORKS OF GOD

#### Baptist Faith and Message Article 2

##### God

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

##### A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3,15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7.

#### MEMORY VERSES

23 But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth, (John 4:23-4, HCSB).

#### THE NATURE AND WORKS OF GOD

What is God? What is God like? What does God do?

According to the polls, most Americans believe in the existence of God. However, the views of God that people hold vary widely. The average American has given little thought to his

understanding of God. They seem content to believe that God is there for them when they need Him (or her or it?) and will accept everyone who at least made the slightest effort to be sincere and decent in this life. The question then should not be, "Do you believe in God?" But, "Tell me about the God you believe in and what do you base this on?"

Baptists, along with most other Evangelical Christians, believe the Bible alone is our authority as the revealed Word of God. We, therefore, base our understanding of God on His Word alone.

When we think about what God is like, often theologians refer to this as the "attributes" of God. Some prefer to think of these descriptions as the "perfections" of God. Let's begin by considering what God is not like.

QUESTION 1: Is God equated with nature or creation?

ANSWER: Gen 1:1; 1 Kings 8:27; Prov 3:19; Ps 102:26-27; Rom 1:25; Heb. 1:10-12; Acts 17:24

SUMMARIZE:

QUESTION 2: Is God, as Mormons believe, a perfected man with a flesh-and-bones body or an invisible Spirit?

ANSWER: Isa 31:3; Luke 24:39; John 1:18; 4:24; 5:37; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; Heb 11:27

SUMMARIZE:

QUESTION 3: Does God possess the characteristics of an impersonal force or principle as New Age and Eastern religions teach, or is God is a personal being possessing mind, will, and emotion?

ANSWER:

1. Intelligence; self-awareness; knowledge, wisdom, truth? Ps 117:2; Acts 15:18; Heb 4:13; John 21:17; Rom 11:33; 1 John 3:20

2. Emotions? Num 11:1; Ps 7:11; 104:31; 147:11; 2 Sam 11:27; Luke 15:7, 10, 22-24, 32

3. Will, self-determination, purpose?

A. Unconditional purpose with pleasure, never broken (Decretive will): Isa 14:24,27; Dan 4:35; Luke 1:37

B. Conditional purpose with pleasure, sometimes broken (Preceptive will): Luke 7:30; Exod 20:1-17

C. Conditional purpose with displeasure, allowing evil, sin (Permissive will): Ps 81:12; Acts 14:16; Rom. 1:24

SUMMARIZE:

## THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Incommunicable Attributes are true only of God (aka "Natural Attributes," related to God's nature).

1. Spirit. God does not have physical or material existence. When the Bible speaks of God's hands or eyes, it is speaking figuratively (anthropomorphism).
2. Unity. There is only one God (Isa 44:8). Humans have unity in themselves, but there are other humans. God's unity is exclusive.
3. Eternality. God has no beginning or end (Ps 102:25-27). God is outside of time. He is eternally present, the great "I AM" (Exod 3:14).
4. Independence (self-existence, aseity). God does not depend upon anyone or anything for His existence or nature. All creation, however, is dependent upon Him.
5. Infinity. There are no limits to God's existence. He is perfect in His excellencies. By comparison, humans are finite, limited by time and space.
6. Immutability. God does not change (Ps 102:27). Both in essence and in his will, God remains the same. God is perfect. Change would imply imperfection.
7. Simplicity. The material world is made up of composed of constituent parts. God is undivided in His essential being. God is three persons who equally share one essence.
8. Transcendence. God is above and outside His creation.
9. Immanence. God is active, near, and involved in His creation.
10. Glory. There is no one like God. He is the only perfect, eternal, almighty God. "God's glory is the outward radiance of the intrinsic beauty and greatness of his manifold perfections" (John Piper).

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O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! (Ps 139:1-6, NLT)

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The glory of God is the holiness of God put on display. That is, it is the infinite worth of God made manifest.

— John Piper

Communicable Attributes can also be true of humans in an analogous sense. These attributes are communicable in that they are expressed toward us or affect us (aka, "Moral Attributes").

1. Will. God desires certain things and not others. He intends certain goals and not others. He requires certain actions and not others. God's will can be exercised in a sovereign or determinative sense (will of decree) by willing certain things to happen (Eph 1:11); in a permissive sense in which He allows certain things to occur (Acts 2:23); and in a prescriptive sense (will of command) in which He commands a certain response from His creatures (Ps 143:10).
2. Power (omnipotence). Humans have a will, but not the power to always carry it out. God is able to accomplish anything He wills (Ps 115:3).

3. Justice. God is perfectly just. He punishes sin and disobedience and rewards faithfulness and obedience.
4. Goodness. God is benevolent toward His creatures (Acts 14:17), especially His own people (Ps 73:1).
5. Love. God is self-giving, generous, kind to His creatures (1 John 4:8). God's ultimate expression of His love is the giving of His only Son for our salvation (John 3:16, Rom 5:8).
6. Truth. The God of the Bible is the only true and living God, or the only real God, unlike the false, dead, counterfeit pagan gods (1 Thess 1:9, John 17:3). God's word is truth (John 17:17); He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

What about God's holiness?

Holiness means "separateness," or "otherness." We should consider God's holiness the sum total of all His attributes. God exercises all His attributes in holiness. His attributes are guided by His holiness. Holiness is the very foundation of God's being. Everything related to God is described as "holy."

## THE WORKS OF GOD

1. God is Creator. Out of nothing, God brought all things into being by the power of His Word (Gen 1; Ps 33:6). The creation declares the glory of its Creator (Ps 19:1).
2. God is Preserver. God protects and sustains His creation (Col 1:17). Not even a sparrow falls without His concern (Matt 10:29).
3. God is Ruler. In contrast to Deism which teaches that God has withdrawn from His creation, the Bible teaches that God is actively governing His universe (1 Chron 29:11-12; Dan 4:17).
4. God is Law-Giver. God gave His moral law to govern the behavior of humans and to reveal His righteousness. Humanity fails to keep God's law and incurs His just condemnation (Rom 3:9-20).
5. God is Redeemer. God rescued Israel from slavery (Exod 6-12). He rescues all believers from the penalty of sin through His Son Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21-26).

Providential Care

God provides for His creatures, giving us everything we need (Matt 6:26). God is involved with His creatures and the flow of history (Ps 104). We are not living in a universe of blind chance.

Theologian Louis Berkhof defined providence as: "that work of God by which He preserves all His creatures, is active in all that transpires in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end." He further explained that this definition indicates that there are three elements in divine providence, namely, preservation, concurrence or cooperation, and government. The first has reference primarily to being, the second to activity, and the third to the guidance of all things.

The story of Joseph from boyhood in Canaan to old age in Egypt (Gen 37-50) illustrates God's providence as does the story of Esther. The petition "give us this day our daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer relates to God's providence. Jesus taught God's providential care in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:25-34).

Define God's providence in your own words:

#### Attributes of God the Father

1. All-powerful. God is omnipotent. His power is not limited in any way. He revealed Himself as El Shaddai—God Almighty (Gen 17:1). God's power is a great source of comfort and security to God's people. No person or power can withstand Him (Dan 4:35).

2. All-knowing. God is omniscient. He knows all things—past, present, future. Nothing is hidden from Him (Rom 11:33). God never learns anything. He knows all future decisions of His free creatures before they come to pass (Ps 139:1-4). God's knowledge, however, does not infringe upon human responsibility. Further, God is not the efficient cause of the decisions of His free creatures (He is not responsible for the evil choices of His creatures).

3. All-wise. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge; it is the right application of knowledge. Wisdom is a moral issue, not just an intellectual issue. God possesses all knowledge and is perfectly righteous and all-loving, so His decrees and decisions are always wise (Rom 11:33; 16:27; Col 2:3).

One of the most amazing truths God reveals about Himself is the fact that He relates to us as Father (see Ps 103:13). We must never underestimate the power of this relational image. Through His love and care for His creatures, God demonstrates the true character of fatherhood. When Jesus taught us to pray to "our Father, who is in heaven" (Matt 6:9), He opened our eyes to the fact that God's fatherly love is the foundation of our being and the assurance of our future with Him.

Charles S. Kelly Jr., Richard Land, R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Baptist Faith & Message*

#### APPLICATION

A. What difference does it make how people think about the nature of God?

B. How does knowing God's nature and works affect your reaction to hardships in life?

C. What would you like to study further about the nature and works of God?

D. Do you agree with John Calvin that the doctrine of divine providence produces: (a) praise in prosperity, (b) patience in adversity, and (c) peace for the future?

Next week: God the Son.