

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
An Important Word to Begin With . . . . .	5
1 What Is God Like? . . . . .	11
2 Is the Bible Inspired? . . . . .	36
3 Jesus Christ the Lord . . . . .	51
4 The Holy Spirit . . . . .	67
5 The World of Angels . . . . .	89
6 The Nature of Man . . . . .	100
7 Christ's Salvation . . . . .	115
8 What Is the Church? . . . . .	140
9 What Does the Future Hold? . . . . .	159
Notes . . . . .	185
Helpful Books on Bible Doctrine . . . . .	187
Subject Index . . . . .	188
Scripture Index . . . . .	190

# 1

## *What Is God Like?*

IN THE MIDST of the knowledge explosion of the past half century, it is astounding how many have forgotten that the greatest knowledge they could possess is the knowledge of God. Suppose inhabitants of other planets were discovered; this would not be as great as knowing about the one who inhabits heaven. The fact that we have sent men to the moon is not so amazing as sending men to heaven. The knowledge of God is certainly top priority.

### DOES GOD EXIST?

Traditionally there have been two lines of argument used to demonstrate the existence of God.

#### NATURALISTIC ARGUMENTS

The traditional line of proof is philosophical and may or may not satisfy an unbeliever. But the arguments go like this: The first is an argument from cause and effect and simply reminds people that everywhere they look in the world around them they are faced with an effect. In other words, the natural world is a result or an effect, and this forces them to account for that which caused such an effect. Actually there are two possible answers. Either (1) nothing caused this world (but the uncaused emergence of something has never been observed), or (2) something caused this world. This something may be an "eternal cosmic process," or it may be chance, or one might conclude that God was the cause. While we have to admit that this cause-

and-effect argument does not in itself “prove” that the God of the Bible exists, it is fair to insist that the theistic answer is less complex to believe than any other. It takes more faith to believe that evolution or blind intelligence (whatever such a contradictory phrase might mean) could have accounted for the intricate and complex world in which we live than it does to believe that God could.

The second philosophical argument concerns the purpose we see in the world. In other words, we are not only faced with a world (the first argument) but that world seems to have purpose in it. How do you account for this? The nontheist answers that this happens by chance and/or through the processes of natural selection (which are by chance too). The question remains, however: Can random “by chance” actions result in the highly integrated organization which is evident in the world about us? To say it can is possible, but it requires a great deal of faith to believe. The Christian answer may also involve faith, but it is not less believable.

The third argument concerns the nature of man. Man’s conscience, moral nature, intelligence, and mental capacities have to be accounted for in some way. Again the nontheist answers that all of this evolved, and he has proposed very elaborate explanations of how this has happened. A tendency today seems to be to consider man as a biological or organic and cultural or superorganic creature and to account for the evolving of both these aspects totally by chance. But does this explain conscience or that reaching out for a belief in a higher being which seems to be universal (though terribly defective as far as understanding what that being is like)? Or does the very existence of man point to the existence of a personal God? Paul put the question this way to the philosophers of Athens: “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (Ac 17:29).

In connection with this anthropological argument, the moral argument is sometimes delineated. It poses the question, How did the idea of good and bad, right and wrong ever come into human culture? Man seems to have a sense of what is desirable as opposed to what is not. Where does this sense come from, and on what basis does man decide what ought to be desired or what ought not to be? Some argue that man's recognition of good and his quest for a moral ideal point to the existence of a God who gives reality to that ideal. Others have emphasized that the ethical systems advanced by philosophers always contain contradiction and paradox if Christian theism is left out, which argues for the necessity of theism to explain satisfactorily man's idea of good and evil. For instance, the humanist declares that he does not accept any absolute standard, yet in the next breath he exhorts you to do better.

A fourth line of reasoning seems much more sophisticated and much less easy to comprehend. It is called the ontological argument (from the present participle form of the Greek verb "to be"). The idea is that God has to be since man commonly has the idea of a most perfect Being and that idea must include the existence of such a Being. The reason is simply that a being, otherwise perfect, who did not exist would not be so perfect as a being who was perfect and who did exist. Therefore, since this concept does exist in the minds of men, such a most perfect Being must exist. Or to put it another way, since God is the greatest Being who can be thought of, He cannot be conceived as not existing; for if He could, then it would be possible to conceive of a being greater than God who does exist; therefore, God must exist. Many (including Immanuel Kant) do not feel this argument has any value. It originated with Anselm in the twelfth century.

One has to face the fact that these philosophical arguments do not of themselves prove the existence of the true God. But we do not minimize them. They may be used to

establish a presumption in favor of the existence of the God of the Bible, and they produce sufficient evidence to place the unregenerated man under a responsibility to accept further knowledge from God or to reject intelligently this knowledge and thus to relieve God of further obligation on his behalf. You may find that using these lines of reasoning may trigger the thinking or open the way to present the gospel more clearly to a fellow student or friend.

The entire theistic world view has come under massive attack because of the rise of mechanistic science and its questioning of the possibility of miracles and because of the popular acceptance of evolution. Evolution is discussed in chapter 7, but a word about miracles is in order here.

If a miracle is defined (as Hume did) as a violation of the laws of nature, then, of course, the possibility of a miracle happening is slim if not nil. But if a miracle is contrary to *what we know* as the laws of nature, then the possibility of introducing a new factor into the known laws of nature is not eliminated. This new miraculous factor does not contradict nature because nature is not a self-contained whole; it is only a partial system within total reality, and a miracle is consistent within that greater system which includes the supernatural. It is true, however, that a miracle is something which nature, if left to its own resources, could not produce. If one admits the postulate of God, miracles are possible. If one adds the postulates of sin and salvation and sign-evidence, then they seem necessary.

The Christian does not view miracles as an easy way out of difficulties, but as an important part of the real plot of the story of the world. Most historians will not admit the occurrence of a miracle until they have tried every other possible and less probable explanation. But the admitted improbability of a miracle happening at a given time and place does not make the story of its happening untrue or unbelievable. It is improbable that you should be the millionth customer to enter a store and thus receive a prize,

but if you are, your friends should not refuse to believe that you were simply because it was unlikely that you would be.

The dimension of the supernatural is essential to Christianity and is often seen in history. Beware when considering specific miracles that you do not slip into naturalistic explanations for them. Remember, too, that to deny miracles is to deny also the resurrection of Christ, which would mean that our faith is empty.

#### BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS

The other line of proof is what the Bible presents, and this may be summarized very quickly. Often it is said that the Bible does not argue for the existence of God; it simply assumes it throughout. It is true that the opening words of the Bible assume His being, and this assumption underlies and pervades every book. But it is not the whole story to say that the Bible assumes but does not argue God's existence. Look at Psalm 19 and notice that David says clearly that God has revealed His existence in the world around us. Isaiah told backslidden people who were making and worshiping idols to consider the world around them and then think whether or not idols that they made with their hands could fashion such a world. The answer is obviously negative. Then he said, "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things" (Is 40:26). The apostle Paul argued before a non-Christian audience that the rain and change of seasons witness to the existence of God (Ac 14:17). So the Bible does argue for as well as assume the existence of God.

#### HOW HAS GOD REVEALED HIMSELF?

Liberalism teaches that man knows God through his own efforts. In contrast to this, one of the "good" things that Barth did when he thundered on the world his new theology was to remind men that there can be no revelation of God unless God Himself takes the initiative to make Him-

self known. In other words, the question is the one which Zophar asked a few thousand years before, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7). The liberal says yes; the conservative says no (this is not intended to imply that Barth was a conservative, because he also said no; his view of the Bible demonstrates that he was not one).

If God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself, in what ways has He done this? We may think immediately of Christ and the Bible as answers to this question. But there are other answers too, like nature and history. These latter two ways are obviously different from the former in that they do not tell us as much about God. In other words, there seem to be general ways and special ways in which God has revealed Himself; the revelation of God through nature and history is called general revelation, while other means are labeled special revelation.

What are the characteristics of general revelation? Look at Psalm 19:1-6. Verse 1 states the content of that revelation as being the glory and handiwork of God. Verse 2 affirms the continuousness of it — day and night (since the sky is always there for man to behold). Verse 3 states the character of that revelation in nature as being a silent revelation (the word "where" is not in the original text). Verses 4-6 tell that the coverage of that revelation is worldwide (v. 4) and to every man (note v. 6 which intimates that even a blind man can feel the heat of the sun). Romans 1:18-20, which is the other central passage on this doctrine, adds the fact that the revelation of God in nature contains a revelation of His "eternal power and Godhead." God's revelation of Himself through history comes in various ways. He gives all people rain and productive seasons (Ac 14:17); He especially revealed a variety of aspects of His being and power to the nation Israel (Ps 78 — His miraculous power, v. 13; His anger, v. 21; His control of nature, v. 26; His love, v. 38). In many ways the revelation of God through history is more explicit than that through nature.

Through Jesus Christ, God revealed Himself (“exegeted” is the word in Jn 1:18) in clarity and detail. The miracles of Christ showed things like the glory of God (Jn 2:11); His words told of the Father’s care (Jn 14:2); His person showed the Father (Jn 14:9). The way to know God is to know His Son; and apart from the revelation through the Son, little is known of God.

The other avenue of special revelation is the Bible. Today some are saying that the Bible is a lesser revelation than the Son, and to make too much of it is to worship the Bible (bibliolatry). But if we do not make much of the Bible, then we cannot know much of the Son, for our only source of information about the Son (and hence about the Father) is through the Bible. Furthermore, if the Bible is not to be trusted, then again we cannot know truth about the Son. Or if only certain parts of the Bible are trustworthy, we will end up with as many pictures of Christ as there are people picking the parts of the biography which they think are reliable. In other words, if the Bible is not completely true, we end up with either misinformation or subjective evaluation. Jesus Himself asserted that the Bible revealed Him (Lk 24:27, 44-45; Jn 5:39). And, of course, the Bible reveals many other things about God. Think, for instance, of the many aspects of His plan which are known only through the Bible and which tell us about Him. You might say that the Bible is an inexhaustible source of information about God.

#### WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

With all these channels of revelation we ought to be able to learn something about what God is like. Traditionally, the characteristics of God stated formally and systematically are called the attributes of God; and traditionally, they have been divided into two categories. There are some ways in which God is like us (for instance, God is just, and man can be just too); and there are some ways in which God



is unique (for instance, He is infinite, which finds no correspondence in us). However, these categories are not hard and fast, and some of the choices as to which attributes to place within which category are debatable. The important thing to study is the attribute itself to learn not only what it reveals about God but also what implications that it has for one's personal outlook and life.

1. *God is omniscient.* Omniscience means that God knows everything, and this includes the knowledge not only of things that actually happen but also of things which might happen. This kind of knowledge God had by nature and without the effort of learning. Jesus claimed omniscience when He said, "If the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Mt 11:21). Here is a display of the knowledge of things that might have happened. God "tellethe the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names" (Ps 147:4), and "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Ac 15:18).

The practical ramifications of the omniscience of God are many. Think, for instance, what this means in relation to the eternal security of the believer. If God knows all, then obviously nothing can come to light subsequent to our salvation which He did not know when He saved us. There were no skeletons in the closet which He did not know about when He offered to give us eternal salvation. Think again what omniscience means when something tragic occurs in our lives. God knows and has known all about it from the beginning and is working all things out for His glory and our ultimate good. Consider what omniscience ought to mean in relation to living the Christian life. Here is Someone who knows all the pitfalls as well as the ways to be happy and who has offered to give us this wisdom. If we would heed what He says then we could avoid a lot of trouble and experience a lot of happiness.

2. *God is holy.* The word *holiness* is very difficult to define. The dictionary does not help much since it just defines holiness as absence of evil, and it is usually measured against a relative standard. In God, holiness is certainly absence of evil, but it must also include a positive righteousness and all of this measured against Himself as an absolute standard. Holiness is one of the most important, if not the most important, attributes of God, and certainly nothing that God does can be done apart from being in complete harmony with His holy nature. Peter declares that “he which hath called you is holy” (1 Pe 1:15), and then he goes on to state what effect that should have in our lives, namely, “so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [life].”

An analogy may help in understanding this concept of holiness. What does it mean to be healthy? It means more than not being sick. Likewise, holiness is more than absence of sin; it is a positive, healthy state of being right. This is what John meant when he said that God is light (1 Jn 1:5).

The ramification of this is obvious: “Walk in the light.” A proper concept of holiness as a requirement for Christian living would end a lot of discussion about what is permitted to the Christian and what is not. It seems as though many are trying to discover how close they can come to sin without being cut off from their particular Christian group or clique instead of determining the propriety of things on the simple basis of “Is it holy?” Don’t be tempted to be a leader in or follower of the “let’s skate on as thin ice as possible” group; instead, be a leader in holiness. This will please God because it imitates Him.

3. *God is just (or righteousness).* While holiness principally concerns the character of God, justice or righteousness has more to do with the character expressed in His dealings with men. It means that God is equitable, or, as the Bible puts it, He is no respecter of persons. David said,

“The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Ps 19:9; see also Ps 116:5; 145:17; Jer 12:1).

The most obvious application of the justice of God is in connection with judgment. When men stand before God to be judged they will receive full justice. This is both a comfort (for those who have been wronged in life) and a warning (for those who think they have been getting away with evil). Before an unsaved audience Paul emphatically warned of the coming righteous judgment: “He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Ac 17:31).

If you think a little further you might ask if God can save sinners and still be just. This is a good question and is answered by Paul in Romans 3:21-26 in the affirmative, but only because (as he explains) Jesus died to pay the penalty for sin which a just God required. But the price having been paid, God can be just (not compromising His holiness) and at the same time justify the one who believes in Jesus.

4. *God is love (1 Jn 4:8)*. What is love? This is one of the most often used and most infrequently defined words in our vocabulary today. Here is one way of arriving at a proper concept of what love is. When young people think of love they think first and quite naturally of a pleasant emotional experience. And this *is* love, but it is not the whole concept. When those same young people grow up, marry, and have children, they soon learn that they have to discipline those children. The couple that first cuddles a baby and then soon after corrects that baby who, for instance, reaches out to touch a hot stove, is expressing two aspects of love. So any definition of love must be broad enough to include both the cuddling and correcting aspects of love. Therefore, we might tentatively propose the definition that love is that which seeks good for the object loved. But anyone who rears children knows that there are as

many experts on child-rearing as there are grandmothers and aunts. What is good in the opinion of one is not good in the judgment of another. For the Christian this problem of what is good is easily solved. *Good* is the will of God. So, putting that in our tentative definition, we may say that love is that which seeks the will of God in the object loved. Will such a definition work? Let's test it. God is love, meaning that He seeks His own will or glory, and we know that this is true. God loves the world, meaning that He seeks to have His will followed by the world. God loves sinners, meaning He wants them to know His will, and it is His desire that they believe on His Son. We are to love one another, meaning that we are to endeavor to see that the will of God is done in each other. So the definition seems to work.

The love of God seems to be of such a nature as to interest itself in the welfare of creatures in a measure beyond any normal human conception (1 Jn 3:16; Jn 3:16). It is almost beyond human comprehension to think of God allowing Himself to become emotionally involved with human beings. Of course the great manifestation of this was in the sacrifice of His Son for the salvation of men (1 Jn 4:9-10). The Bible also teaches that the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of the children of God (Ro 5:8).

There is a very popular teaching today that says that because God is love and always acts in a loving manner toward His creatures, eventually all men will be saved. This teaching is called universalism. The trouble with the doctrine is not only that it contradicts direct statements of the Bible which say that men will be cast into hell forever (Mk 9:45-48), but it misunderstands the concept of love and its relation to the other attributes of God. Love may have to punish, and the attribute of love does not operate in God apart from His other attributes, particularly the attributes of holiness and justice.

5. *God is true.* Truth is another concept which is difficult to define. The dictionary says that it is agreement

which is represented; if applied to God, it means that God is consistent with Himself and thus everything He does is true also. The Bible asserts that God is true (Ro 3:4) and Jesus claimed to be the truth (Jn 14:6), thus making Himself equal with God. The ramifications of the truthfulness of God lie chiefly in the area of His promises. He cannot be false to any one of the promises He has made. This includes broad and inclusive promises as, for instance, to the nation Israel, and it affects with equal certainty the promises made to believers for daily living. The truth of God also affects His revelation, for He who is true cannot and has not revealed anything false to us.

6. *God is free.* Freedom in God means that He is independent of all His creatures, but it obviously could not mean that He is independent of Himself. Often we hear it said that the only restrictions on God are those inherent in His own person (e.g., God cannot sin because His holiness restricts Him from doing that). Perhaps it would be better to consider the matter in this fashion: the only restrictions on God's freedom are the restrictions of perfection, and since perfection is no restriction, in reality, then, God is not restricted in any way. When Isaiah asked the people, Who has directed the Lord or who has taught Him anything or who has instructed Him? (Is 40:13-14), He expected the answer "no one," because God is free (independent of His creatures). If this be true, then anything God has done for His creatures is not out of a sense of obligation to them, for He has none. What He has done for us is out of His love and compassion for us.

7. *God is omnipotent.* Fifty-six times the Bible declares that God is the almighty one (and this word is used of no one but God, cf. Rev 19:6). When students talk about the omnipotence of God they often joke about it along the line of asking if God could make two plus two equal six. The trouble with such a question is simply that it is not in the realm which omnipotence is concerned with. You might

as well ask if dynamite could make two plus two equal six. The truths of mathematics are not in the area of omnipotence. But the security of the believer certainly is, and we are kept secure in our salvation by an omnipotent God (1 Pe 1:5). In fact, our salvation comes because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Ro 1:16). So rather than meditating on the ridiculous, let's be thankful for the basics of our redemption which are effected by the power of God. Furthermore, God's omnipotence is seen in His power to create (Gen 1:1), in His preservation of all things (Heb 1:3), and in His providential care for us.

8. *God is infinite and eternal.* Since there is nothing in our human natures which corresponds to *infinity* (only the opposite, finitude), it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to comprehend the term. Indeed, most dictionaries resort to defining it by negatives – without termination or without finitude. *Eternity* is usually defined as infinity related to time. Whatever is involved in these concepts, we can see that they must mean God is not bound by the limitations of finitude and He is not bound by the succession of events, which is a necessary part of time. Also His eternality extends backward from our viewpoint of time as well as forward forever. Nevertheless, this concept does not mean that time is unreal to God. Although He sees the past and future as clearly as the present, He sees them as including succession of events, without being Himself bound by that succession. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps 90:2; cf. Gen 21:33; Ac 17:24).

9. *God is immutable.* Immutability means that God is unchanging and unchangeable. God never differs from Himself, and thus in our concept of God there can be no idea of a growing or developing being. He is the one in whom is no variableness (Ja 1:17; cf. Mal 3:6; Is 46:9-10).

There is a problem in connection with the immutability

of God, and it concerns verses which say that God repented (Gen 6:6; Jon 3:10). If these verses are understood to mean that there actually was a change in God's plans, then He is either not immutable or not sovereign. But if such verses refer only to the revelation or unfolding of God's plans to men, then it can be said that although His plan does not change, as man views its unfolding it seems to involve change. In other words, God's "repentance" is only from our viewpoint; therefore, it is only apparent repentance as His eternal and unchanging plan is worked out in history.

10. *God is omnipresent.* Omnipresence means simply that God is everywhere present. That concept is not difficult, but some aspects related to it are. For instance, what is the difference between omnipresence and pantheism? Essentially, it is this: Omnipresence says God is everywhere present (though separate from the world and the things in it), while pantheism says that God is *in* everything. Omnipresence says that God is present in the room where you are reading this, while pantheism affirms that God is in the chair and in the window, etc. Another important distinction is this: Even though God *is* everywhere (though not *in* everything), this does not contradict the fact that there are varying degrees of the manifestation of His presence. God's presence in the Shekinah glory was an immediate and localized manifestation of His presence, while His presence in relation to unredeemed men is scarcely realized by them. Furthermore, the presence of God is not usually in visible or bodily form. Occasionally He has appeared so that His glory was seen, but omnipresence is a spiritual manifestation of God. Psalm 139 teaches His omnipresence in a most vivid way, and of course this doctrine means that no one can escape God. If people try throughout their entire lifetime, they still cannot escape Him at death. On the other hand, it also means that a believer may experience the presence of God at all times and know the blessing of walking with Him in every trial and circumstance of life.

11. *God is sovereign.* The word *sovereign* means chief, highest or supreme. When we say that God is sovereign we are saying that He is the number one Ruler in the universe. Actually, the word itself does not tell anything about how that Ruler may rule, although this is described in the Bible. The word itself means only that He is the supreme Being in the universe. Of course, the position brings with it a certain amount of authority, and in God's case that authority is total and absolute. This does not mean, however, that He rules His universe as a dictator, for God is not only sovereign, He is also love and holiness. He can do nothing apart from the exercise of all His attributes acting harmoniously together. The concept of sovereignty involves the entire plan of God in all of its intricate details of design and outworking. Although He often allows things to take their natural course according to laws which He designed, it is the sovereign God who is working all things according to His wise plan.

That the Bible teaches the sovereignty of God there can be no doubt. Just read Ephesians 1 and Romans 9 (and don't worry about all the ramifications). For the Christian the idea of sovereignty is an encouraging one, for it assures him that nothing is out of God's control, and that His plans do triumph.

These are the principal attributes or characteristics of God, and this is the only God that exists. The God of the Bible is not a god of man's own making or thinking or choosing, but He is the God of His own revelation.

#### WHAT DOES GOD CALL HIMSELF?

A person's names always tell something about him or about the relationship he has to those who use the names. Often names grow out of experiences people have. So it is with God. He has revealed aspects of His nature by the names He uses with men, and some of them have grown out of specific experiences men have had with God.



## PRIMARY OLD TESTAMENT NAMES

1. *Elohim*. The most general (and least specific in significance) name for God in the Old Testament is Elohim. Although its etymology is not clear, it apparently means "Strong One," and it is used not only of the true God but also of heathen gods (Gen 31:30; Ex 12:12). The *im* ending indicates that the word is plural, and this has given rise to considerable speculation as to the significance of the plural. Some have suggested that it is an indication of polytheism, which would be difficult to sustain since the singular (*Eloah*) is rarely used and since Deuteronomy 6:4 clearly says that God is one. Others have attempted to prove the concept of the Trinity from this plural word. While the doctrine of the Trinity is of course a biblical one, it is very doubtful that it can be proved on the basis of this name for God. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the plural Elohim in no way indicates some distinctions within the Godhead. Though the plural does allow for the subsequent clear revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament, it most likely is best understood as indicating fullness of power. Elohim, the strong one, is the powerful Governor of the universe and of all the affairs of mankind. This name for God occurs over 2,500 times in the Old Testament. Take time to read verses like Genesis 1:1 and remember that this one is your God in all the circumstances of life.

2. *Jehovah*. This is the most specific name for God in the Old Testament, though Jehovah is not a real word! It is actually an artificial English word put together from the four Hebrew consonants YHWH and the vowels from another name for God, *Adonai*. Thus Jehovah was concocted this way: YaHoWaH, or Jehovah. The Jews had a superstitious dread of pronouncing the name YHWH, so whenever they came to it they said Adonai. We probably ought to pronounce it Yahweh.

The meaning of the word is also a matter of much discussion. There seems to be agreement that it is connected

somehow with the Hebrew verb, *to be*, or some variant or earlier form of it, so that it does have the idea of God's eternal self-existence (Ex 3:14). In its use in Exodus 6:6, however, there seems to be an added idea that connects this name in a special way with God's power to redeem Israel out of Egyptian bondage. We have already seen that a name usually tells something about a person and some relationship that person has. In the name *Yahweh* these two features of a name are evident: Yahweh is eternal, and Yahweh bore a special relationship to Israel as her Redeemer.

The name occurs nearly 7,000 times in the Old Testament and is especially associated with Yahweh's holiness (Lev 11:44-45), with His hatred of sin (Gen 6:3-7) and with His gracious provision of redemption (Is 53:1, 5, 6, 10).

3. *Adonai*. This is the name of God which the Jews substituted for the Tetragrammaton (the four letters YHWH, Yahweh) when they read the Scriptures. Yet it, too, is a basic designation for God and means Lord (master). It is used, as one might expect, of the relationship between men (like master and slave, as in Ex 21:1-6); thus when it refers to God's relationship with men it conveys the idea of His absolute authority. Notice its occurrences in Joshua 5:14 (where Joshua recognized the authority of the captain of the Lord's hosts) and Isaiah 6:8-11 (where Isaiah was commissioned by his Master).

There are two sides to a master-servant relationship. On the one hand, the servant must give absolute obedience to his master. On the other hand the master obligates himself to take care of the servant. If the believer truthfully calls God by His name, Lord, then he can expect God to take care of him, and God in turn can expect the believer to obey Him in everything.

#### COMPOUND OLD TESTAMENT NAMES

Frequently the Old Testament reveals something about the character or activity of God by using some designation

in compound with Yahweh or El (which is the singular of Elohim). Here are some examples:

1. *El Elyon* – “*The most high*” (Gen 14:22). Notice its use in connection with Lucifer’s desire to be like the Most High (Is 14:14).

2. *El Olam* – “*The everlasting God*” (Gen 21:33). Notice this use in connection with God’s inexhaustible strength (Is 40:28).

3. *El Shaddai* – “*The Almighty God*” (Gen 17:1). This probably derives from a related word which means “mountain” and pictures God as the overpowering almighty one standing on a mountain. The name is often used in connection with the chastening of God’s people, as in Ruth 1:20-21 and the thirty-one times it is used in the book of Job.

4. *Yahweh Jireh* – *The Lord provides* (Gen 22:14). This is the only occurrence. After the angel of the Lord pointed to a ram as a substitute for Isaac, Abraham named the place, “the Lord provides.”

5. *Yahweh Nissi* – *The Lord is my Banner* (Ex 17:15). Similarly, after the defeat of the Amalekites, Moses erected an altar and called it Yahweh Nissi. Actually this and the other compounds are not really names of God, but designations that grew out of commemorative events.

6. *Yahweh Shalom* – *The Lord is peace* (Judg 6:24).

7. *Yahweh Sabaoth* – “*The LORD of hosts*” (1 Sa 1:3). The hosts are the angels of heaven which are ready to obey the Lord’s commands. This title was often used by the prophets (Isaiah and Jeremiah) during times of national distress to remind the people that Yahweh was still their Protector.

8. *Yahweh Maccaddeshcem* – *The Lord thy Sanctifier* (Ex 31:13).

9. *Yahweh Roi* – “*The LORD . . . my shepherd*” (Ps 23:1).

10. *Yahweh Tsidkenu* – *The Lord our Righteousness* (Jer 23:6). This title was a direct thrust against King

Zedekiah (which means Yahweh is righteousness) who was a completely unrighteous king (2 Ch 36:12-13).

11. *Yahweh Shammah* – “The LORD is there” (Eze 48: 35).

12. *Yahweh Elohim Israel* – “The LORD God of Israel” (Judg 5:3). This is a designation frequently used by the prophets (Is 17:6), similar to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

13. *Qadosh Israel* – “The Holy One of Israel” (Is 1:4).

This list might go on and on because these compounds are not really distinct names but are more designations or titles. Yet they need to be included in our study since they do reveal some things about God. Remember, in the East a name is more than an identification; it is descriptive of its bearer, often revealing some characteristic or activity of that person. “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Ps 8:1, 9).

To review: The knowledge of the true God is the highest knowledge any person can have. There are certain logical arguments which can at least tip the balance in favor of theism (though they do not tell us who God is or what He is like). The world around us tells us of the power of God, but it is from the Bible that we learn the full facts about God. Specifically we learn about Him through what the Bible says about His character (attributes) and His names.

#### WHAT IS THE TRINITY?

The word *trinity* is not found in the Bible; indeed, many think it is a poor word to use to try to describe this particular teaching of the Bible. Actually, it describes only half the teaching; the reason will become clear shortly.

When you study a book like this, it may appear to you that the writer, or the church, or somebody else is saying to you, “Here are the doctrines – believe them!” If that’s the case it is only because you are looking at the results of someone’s study, not the process of it. We are not saying,

“Here are some doctrines to be believed whether you like it or not,” but rather, “Here are some facts to be faced. How would you harmonize and organize them?”

The teaching on the Trinity is a good illustration of this point. You have probably heard lessons on the Trinity in which you were taught only the results: that the one God exists in three Persons. Then you asked for illustrations and got none that were satisfying. So you concluded that there was a doctrine you were expected to believe – regardless! Actually, the way we ought to go about it is this: as we read the Bible, certain astounding facts confront us and demand our attention. Specifically, the Bible seems to say clearly that there is only one true God. But it also seems to say with equal clarity that there was a man Jesus Christ who claimed equality with God and there is Someone called the Holy Spirit who is also equal with God. Now how do you put those facts together? The way conservatives have put them together results in the doctrine of the Trinity. Others have put these facts together and have come up with a different idea of the Trinity (the Persons being modes of expression of God and not distinct persons), and still others, rejecting the claims of Christ and the Spirit to be God, become unitarians. But the claims are still there in the Bible, and the need for packaging them is what we study in this section.

Any concept of the Trinity must be carefully balanced, for it must maintain on the one side the unity of God, and on the other, the distinctness and equality of the Persons. That is why the word *trinity* only tells half of the doctrine – the “threeness” part and not the unity. Perhaps the word *trinity* is better since it contains both ideas – the “tri” (the threeness) and the “unity” (the oneness).

#### EVIDENCE FOR ONENESS

Deuteronomy 6:4 may be translated various ways (e.g., “Yahweh our God is one Yahweh,” or “Yahweh is our God,

Yahweh alone”), but in any case it is a strong declaration of monotheism. So are Deuteronomy 4:35 and 32:39 as well as Isaiah 45:14 and 46:9. The first of the so-called Ten Commandments shows that Israel was expected to understand that there is only one true God (Ex 20:3; Deu 5:7). The New Testament is equally clear in passages like 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Ephesians 4:3-6 and James 2:19, all of which state emphatically that there is only one true God. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity must not imply in any way that there might be three Gods. God is single and unique, demanding the exclusion of all pretended rivals and removing any hint of tritheism.

#### EVIDENCE FOR THREENESS

Nowhere does the New Testament explicitly state the doctrine of triunity (since 1 Jn 5:7 is apparently not a part of the genuine text of Scripture), yet the evidence is overwhelming.

1. The Father is recognized as God. Notice, among many Scripture verses, John 6:27 and 1 Peter 1:2. This point is seldom debated.

2. Jesus Christ is recognized as God. Doubting Thomas recognized Him as such (Jn 20:28). He Himself claimed some of the attributes which only God has, like omniscience (Mt 9:4), omnipotence (Mt 28:18) and omnipresence (Mt 28:20). Further, He did things which only God can do (and the people recognized this) (Mk 2:1-12 – healing the paralytic was done to prove that Christ had the power to forgive sins which was acknowledged as something only God can do).

3. The Holy Spirit is recognized as God. He is spoken of as God (Ac 5:3-4 – lying to the Spirit is the same as lying to God). He possesses the same attributes as God and those which belong exclusively to God (omniscience, 1 Co 2:10; omnipresence, Ps 139:7). It is the Spirit who regenerates man (Jn 3:5-6, 8).

This New Testament evidence is quite clear and explicit. Is there any similar evidence in the Old Testament? The answer is no, because what the Old Testament reveals concerning the Trinity is not clear and explicit but intimating and implicit. It is probably best to say that the Old Testament, although it does not reveal the triunity of God, does allow for the later New Testament revelation of it. Passages which use the plural word for God, Elohim, and plural pronouns of God allow for this subsequent revelation (Gen 1:1, 26). The Angel of Yahweh is recognized as God and yet is distinct from God (Gen 22:15-16), indicating two equal Persons. The Messiah is called the mighty God (Is 9:6 and note eternity ascribed to Him in Mic 5:2) again indicating two equal yet distinct Persons. Probably Isaiah 48:16 is the clearest intimation of the Trinity in the Old Testament because “I” – the Lord – is associated with God and the Spirit in an apparently equal relationship. But still these are only intimations and are not so explicit as the New Testament evidences.

#### THE EVIDENCE FOR TRIUNITY

Probably the verse that best states the doctrine of the triunity of God balancing both aspects of the concept, the unity and the Trinity, is Matthew 28:19, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” There is no question about the “threeness” aspect, for the Father, Son and Spirit are mentioned – and only three. The unity is strongly indicated in the singular “name” rather than “names.” There are other verses similar to this one where the three are associated in equality and yet distinguished (like the benediction in 2 Co 13:14 and the presence of the Trinity at the baptism of Christ, Mt 3:16-17), but they do not also contain the strong emphasis on unity as indicated in the singular “name” in Matthew 28:19.

Having looked at the evidence and having concluded that

there is one God and yet three Persons in the Godhead, is it possible to formalize this concept in a definition? Warfield's is one of the best: "The doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and co-equal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence." Subsistence means being or existence. The word *person* is really not so good, because it seems to indicate separate individuals in the Godhead; but, though we all recognize deficiency in the word, what better one is there?

Can the Trinity be illustrated? Not perfectly, nor probably very well, because most illustrations cannot include the idea that the three fully possess all the qualities of the one equally and without separation. One illustration from psychology notes that the innermost being of man — his soul — can carry on dialogue with itself, noting both sides of the debate and making judgments. Another uses the sun (like the Father) and notes that we only see the light of the sun, not the sun itself, which yet possesses all the properties of the sun (like the Son who came to earth), and observing further that the chemical power of the sun (which also possesses all the qualities of the sun and yet is distinct) is what makes plants grow. The sun, its light, and its power may give some help in illustrating the Trinity.

It is no wonder that a difficult doctrine like this has been the focal point of many errors throughout church history. One error that crops up again and again sees the Spirit as a mere influence and not a living person who is God. Sometimes Christ, too, is regarded as inferior to the Father, even as is some created being (dynamic Monarchianism, Arianism, present-day Unitarianism). Another error regards the concept of the Trinity as merely modes or manifestations of God (Sabellianism, after Sabellius, *c.* A.D. 250, or modalism). Karl Barth was for all intents and purposes a modalist, though he often rejected the label.

Is the teaching important? How else could you conceive



of our atonement being accomplished apart from a triune God? God becoming man, living, dying, raised from the dead is pretty hard to conceive of if you are a Unitarian. Does not this doctrine illuminate the concept of fellowship? The fact that God is Father, Son and Spirit emphasizes the fact that He is a God of love and fellowship within His own being. And this is the one with whom we as believers can enjoy fellowship as well.

### THE FATHER

Since the Son and the Holy Spirit are considered in detail later, we need to add a word here concerning the particular relationships and works of the Father.

#### THE PARTICULAR RELATIONSHIPS OF THE FATHER

1. All people are called the offspring of God (Ac 17:29); therefore, there is a sense in which God is the Father of all men as their Creator. This is simply a creature-Creator relationship and is in no sense a spiritual one.

2. God is the Father of the nation Israel (Ex 4:22). Not all in Israel were redeemed, so this relationship was both spiritual (with believers) and governmental (with all in Israel, whether believers or not).

3. God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 3:17).

4. In a very special way God is the Father of all who believe in Christ (Gal 3:26).

#### THE PARTICULAR WORKS OF THE FATHER

Almost everything God does involves in some way or other all the Members of the Trinity. So when we speak of the particular works of the Father we are not excluding the other Persons, but simply delineating those things which seem to be the prerogative of the Father in a special way.

1. It is the Father who was the Author of the decree or plan of God (Ps 2:7-9).

2. The Father was related to the act of election as its Author (Eph 1:3-6).
3. The Father sent the Son to this world (Jn 5:37).
4. The Father is the disciplinarian of His children (Heb 12:9).

#### IMPORTANT RAMIFICATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Two final thoughts:

1. There is no other God but the one we have been trying to describe. Gods of our making, whether radically different from the God of the Bible or akin to Him, are false. Even good Christians can fall into the trap of trying to mold God according to their own thinking or wishes or pleasure. The result may be a god not dissimilar to the God of the Bible, but it will not be the true God. We know God not because we can initiate or generate such knowledge, but because He has revealed Himself. Therefore, what we know does not come from our minds but from His revelation. Beware of creating a god!
2. If the true God is as He is revealed to be, then it shouldn't be hard for us to believe that He could perform miracles, give us an inspired Bible, become incarnate, or take over the kingdoms of this world. In other words, if we accept the facts about the true God which have been revealed, then it shouldn't be difficult to believe He could and can do what is claimed of Him. That is why the knowledge of God takes first priority in the study of doctrine.