



Talks 5-8 of Michael Eaton's Whole Counsel of God series

OVERVIEW OF SECTION:

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 1 (TALK 5): THE EXISTENCE OF GOD/THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

- A. The existence of God
- B. The know-ability of God

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 2 (TALK 6): THE TRINITY/THE NAME AND NAMES OF GOD

- C. The three-ness of God (the doctrine of the Trinity)
- D. The name and the names of the LORD

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 3 (TALK 7): THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATIONS & PICTURES OF GOD/THE CHARACTER OF GOD

- E. The pictures or metaphors of God
- F. God's character – 12 descriptions

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 4 (TALK 8): THE CHARACTER OF GOD CONT

- F cont'd. God's character, 17 more descriptions

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 1 THE EXISTENCE OF GOD/THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

TALK 5

- Contents:
- A. The existence of God (time 6:32)
- B. The know-ability of God (time 25:10)

Hosea 6:1-3

¹"Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. ³ Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."

The Bible gives a highly practical view of God.

A. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The Bible never argues about whether God exists. It just talks about him as though He is there. The philosophical arguments for the existence for God often don't hold water. And they usually land up with a God who is not the God of the Bible anyway.

The Bible insists that we know that God is there anyway. By virtue of his creation:

Romans 1:18-20

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ 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 people are without excuse.

No one is born an atheist. People are taught to be atheists. All the so-called scientific arguments against God's existence haven't convinced our world to become atheist.

If you reject the true God you end up with inferior gods, as seen in these verses:

Romans 1:21-25

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

When we reject the God of glory, we end up with other gods that are far less glorious.

Think of Richard Dawkin's book, 'The God Delusion' – in his book, he rejects belief in God, and replaces it with evolution. But then he asks the question, 'How did we land up as humans with this wide-spread belief in God?' The answer he gives is, 'EVOLUTION MADE A MISTAKE.'

Modern unbelievers do the same thing – we replace the God of the Bible with 'Mother Earth' or 'Mr. Evolution'. We bring in these debased alternatives. Then perversions come into our lives. We land up with a God where there is no morality needed. Society gets messed up.

The Bible doesn't prove God, but it does say that God will prove himself:

Isaiah 45:1

¹ "This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of
Hundreds of years before Cyrus, Isaiah prophesied how God would use him. He did this by the power of a living God.

Isaiah 45:5

⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.

Only God, not idols, knows the future. God tells the future to show that he really is God. God eventually does things that make nations know that he is God. But he is not in a hurry to do this. God acts eventually! There are mighty deeds of God, such as the resurrection of Jesus, the return of Jesus, the crossing the Red Sea, or crossing the river Jordan.

Joshua 4:23-24

²³ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.”

We don't prove God. He proves himself. When God does prove himself it is in judgment. Salvation comes by faith. When God does prove himself it is too late to be saved. Every knee will bow. If a person waits for God to prove himself, it will be too late. He wants us to believe in him because of his word, his promise. Get to know God is real by trusting in God. First believe, then experience how real God is. Let God prove himself to you by the blessing that comes upon you when you put your faith in Christ. The only sign that God gives us that he is real is Jesus.

But there are two things we can do to prove God:

1) We need to be willing to do God's will. He will also reveal himself to those who are willing to do his will.

John 7:17 (time 21:00)

¹⁷ Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

Would you be willing to do his will? If so, then Jesus will reveal himself to you.

2) We need to trust in God's word. Look at this verse:

Psalm 18:30

The word of the LORD proves true

When you read God's Word and trust in it, it proves itself to you. It tells you that you're a sinner in need of a Saviour. It tells you Jesus died for you. The more you trust God's word, the more God confirms the reality of God to us.

Last thought on this subject: You can't prove God because God is the proof of everything else. There will be no world here if God wasn't behind it all. The Big Bang (everything comes from nothing) and the order in the universe evidence God too. Modern Scientists are amazed by how our world is designed for the human race: 'The world seems to have known we were coming,' said one scientist. Things have been so finely tuned for our existence. This is a strong argument for God's existence. God is back behind it all.

B. THE KNOW-ABILITY OF GOD (25:10)

Hosea 6:1-3

¹"Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. ²After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. ³Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."

Hosea, writing to the rebellious Northern kingdom, warns them about life without God. God had torn them (v1). Now they are to 'press on to know the LORD' (v3).

As we have seen in the previous point on God's existence, there is a universal knowledge of God. Our conscience gives us a feeling that God is there.

But what about those who haven't heard of Jesus? There is enough evidence for everyone to know that God is there. Everyone knows something of God through creation. But it is not enough to save us! Sunsets and eclipses tell us God is there, but they don't tell us about God's plan to save us and forgive us through Jesus. This knowledge is enough to condemn us, but not enough to save us. It is enough to let us know that we are sinning against a God who is there.

(It is possible that God could speak to someone about salvation through creation – such as he did to the Magi (Matthew 2:1-2) – but this is very unusual. People need to hear about Jesus to know God.) But there is another kind of knowledge of God over and above the universal knowledge of God. Though people know something about God they are still described as being in darkness.

Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness

The light referred to in this verse is Jesus (see verse 6). Before Jesus shone on people, they were in darkness.

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

People don't know God personally. They may know something about God, but they don't know him personally. Yet the Bible invites us to get to know God personally.

But how does this happen? It happens as God reveals himself?

Job 11:7 KJ version

Canst thou by searching find out God?

1 Corinthians 2:20-21

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him ... (the world by wisdom did not know God)

Matthew 11:27

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

We only get to know God if Jesus reveals him to us.

John 14:6

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

The only way to know God is through Jesus.

You can know God personally, only partially of course, but still you know something of God. But there is much you don't know still.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

God won't answer all your questions. He holds secrets that he does not tell us. There are many questions that are rightly answered, 'I don't know'. We can know God without everything. For example, 'How can God be one and three at the same time?' and 'How can Jesus be God and man at the same time?' (Think of how Jesus, who has fallen asleep out of exhaustion on a boat, the next moment tells a storm to stop, and it stops (see Matthew 8:23-26).) The answer, I don't know. But God does.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

There are some things that are revealed for practical purposes. God does not just satisfy our curiosity, he wants to teach us how to live. Our knowledge of God is partial.

Our knowledge of God is also progressive. We grow in our knowledge of God. If we follow the story of the Bible we see that God progressively revealed himself over the centuries. He revealed more and more truth about himself. When Jesus comes, he will reveal even more than he has now revealed by the Bible.

How can we get to know God?

1) We begin by sheer faith. We trust what he tells us in the Bible about our sinfulness, Jesus, the Saviour, the Holy Spirit. We need to put our bare faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2) We ask God to give us life.

John 4:13, 14

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

We see God gives us life. What will God give us if we come to Jesus? Answer: life – a new quality and quantity of life. He gives you life. Then he gives us assurance. His Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are God's child.

3) But this is just the beginning. Then we need to press on so as to know the LORD more and more. Even Paul wanted to know God more and more deeply, even in the midst of suffering.

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings ...

WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE TO KNOW GOD?

1) Knowing God involves honesty. In the following verse we see that as we confess our sins we experience him cleansing our consciences ...

1 John 1:7, 9

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

2) Knowing God involves a distinct relationship with the Father, the Son and the Spirit. In the following verse we see that we experience Jesus, the Father and the Spirit in different ways.

2 Corinthians 14:13

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

3) Knowing God involves seeking God. We don't seek God in order to be saved. The Bible doesn't tell a not-yet Christian to seek God. Once we are saved, then we seek God, but to be saved we simply must believe in Jesus, not go on some long 'search' for God. We see in this story how suddenly someone can be saved.

Acts 16:29-31

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

We only need to seek God after we are saved, not before. God saves us the second we trust in Jesus. But then we start to seek God, and his will for our life. We can seek God with questions, and very often God answers our questions. This story shows how we can speak to God with questions, and he will answer us.

Genesis 25:22-23

The babies jostled each other within Rebekkah, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

4) Knowing God involves knowing God's ways. Lastly, we must get to know God's ways. God has ways (or habits). He wants us to know his ways. He wants to teach us how he relates to us. As we get to know God, we get to know his ways.

In conclusion, God is knowable in Jesus.

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 2

THE TRINITY/THE NAME AND NAMES OF GOD

TALK 6

Contents:

- C. The three-ness of God (the doctrine of the Trinity) (3:25)
- D. The name and the names of the LORD (28:15)

You can describe God in words. The Bible gives us statements about God that help us to understand more about God. It is not merely intellectual knowledge of God – over and above that, we experience God.

C. THE THREE-NESS OF GOD

What kind of language do we use as we try express doctrine?

1) We can use the language of the Bible. Problem: there is no jargonistic, technical use of words in the Bible. In different passages, words such as 'God', or 'save' take on a different meaning.

2) We can take Bible words and use them, giving them our own meaning. For example we do this with the word 'sanctification'. By this we mean 'the process of change into Christlikeness', but sometimes the Bible writers use it to mean something else. The problem is that we take one use of a Bible word and make it our technical term. We do the same with the word 'justification'. The problem is that this word is used differently in different places. For example, Paul uses it differently to James for example. It is not wrong to take option 2) but we must be aware that the Bible has other meanings for that word too.

3) We can have our own terms to express the teachings of the Bible. This is good, but people will criticize us for using a non-Bible word. This is the case with the word 'Trinity'. The word itself is not in the Bible, but what it tries to explain is in the Bible. It is a second century word.

The word 'Trinity' summarizes a teaching of seven different truths that are clearly taught in the Bible (8:01)

- 1) There is only one God
- 2) God is Father.
- 3) God has a Son, who is divine.

- 4) The Spirit is divine.
- 5) The Father is not the Son.
- 6) The Father is not the Spirit.
- 7) The Son is not the Spirit.

If you say, 'I can't understand those things' then I say, 'Nor can I'. It is a mystery. We believe this because this is how God has revealed himself. The best way of coming at the Trinity is experientially. We, as Christians, know what it is to experience God as Father, and as Son, and as Spirit.

The whole Bible is full of 'Trinitarian' passages (11:50). Here are some examples, of how the concept of God being three is always there.

Romans 5:1, 5

¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Ephesians 1:3,4,11

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he (God) chose us in him (Christ) ... ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him (Christ) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit

Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name (not 'the names') of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

The Bible assumes and teaches that Jesus is divine. Here is just one example of this teaching in the Bible (and there are so many):

Galatians 1:1, 3

¹Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father ... ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Verse one assumes that Jesus is not an ordinary man, and puts Jesus and the Father on the same level. Verse three shows that grace and peace come equally through the Father and Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is divine, yet so often the Bible just speaks of the Father and the Son, and seems to not mention the Spirit. For example, in 1 John 1:3 it says. 'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his

Son, Jesus Christ.' Why is this? Why does the New Testament sometimes seem to be more Binitarian (Father and Son, both divine, with no mention of the Spirit) than Trinitarian? The answer is that the Holy Spirit is the quiet, humble member of the Trinity. His task is not so much to be the one with whom we have fellowship, but rather to be the one who gives us the fellowship ...

John 16:14, 15

¹⁴ He (the Holy Spirit) will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

The Spirit seeks to glorify Jesus. He glorifies Jesus. People who are obsessed with the Holy Spirit are missing it. Powerful outpourings of the Spirit are marked by a Jesus-obsession not a Spirit-obsession.

Should we pray to the Holy Spirit? It is not wrong, it is just hardly practiced and taught in the Bible. We pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus, and yet we are conscious of the Spirit's presence – but we are not really talking to him.

We are in danger when we glorify the Spirit more than we glorify Jesus. We are in danger of a Holy Spirit-centred faith.

2 Corinthians 13:14

¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

From this verse we see that the Father is primarily the one who loves us, Jesus is primarily the one through whom grace comes, and the Spirit is the one who makes intimate, experiential fellowship with the Father and the Son possible.

Each of the Trinity has a special task within God's plan of creation and salvation:

- The Father is the planner and the originator.
- Jesus is the mediator, the one through whom things take place.
- The Spirit is the executive. He gets things done.

THERE ARE THREE HERESIES ABOUT THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY THAT YOU MUST AVOID:

- 1) The danger of tri-theism. This is the danger of believing in three gods. But there is only one God.
- 2) The danger of Sabellianism. This is a big term that simply means to believe, as Sabellias once taught, that there is one God who appears in three different terms. This is the wrong belief that God sometimes appears as the Father, and other times as the Son, and other times as the Spirit. But the truth is that God, though being one, is also three distinct persons. For example, at Christ's baptism we see the Father, Son and Spirit are distinct from each other.
- 3) The danger of subordinationism. This is the wrong belief that the Son and the Spirit have lesser forms of deity than the Father. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, believe Jesus was 'a god'. To prove this false teaching, people who believe this quote such texts as Jesus saying, 'My Father is greater than I'. But we must not confuse who Jesus is as a man, with who Jesus is as God. These texts are referring to Jesus as a man, and are not focusing on his deity. Jesus, when he came to this earth, humbled himself and became a man dependent on the Father and the Spirit. This is why Jesus, the man, would speak about God as 'My God and my Father.' Jesus became as we are, except for sin.

The doctrine of the Trinity took some time to be clarified and articulated by the church. It was the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 that finally clarified this. At this time a false teacher, called Arias, tried to persuade the church that Jesus was a created being, and therefore was not on the same level with the Father. But the church overthrew this heresy at this time by articulating the great Bible-taught truth that Jesus was and is fully God, and yet fully man.

D. THE NAME AND THE NAMES OF GOD

The Bible tells us about 'the Name of God'. In Bible times, names referred to an aspect of someone's character. For example Abraham means 'father of a multitude'. Nabal means 'fool'. Jacob means 'grabber'.

God is sometimes called 'the Name' (Leviticus 24:11). The 'Name of God' captures the very nature and character of God. For example, when we do or pray something 'in the name of God' it means we're looking for God's power and character to be outworked. See how Jesus refers to 'the name of God' three times in these verses:

John 17:11-12

Holy Father, protect them (or 'keep them') by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.

There is not much difference in meaning between 'the name of God' and 'the glory of God'. See how Moses asks to see God's glory, and in response God proclaims his name.

Exodus 33:12, 18

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me.' ¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence.

Also notice how the third commandment tells us not to misuse the name of God. This means that we must not distort his character.

Exodus 20:7

⁷ "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

On the subject of 'names', God wants to honour our name. This means that he wants to honour us (see Revelations 3:5). Our name in the sight of God refers to our reputation (i.e. his record of our deeds) in his sight. Figuratively speaking, God puts beside our name (on his list) a record of our deeds. And he rewards us accordingly. If, as Christians, our name is 'blotted out of the book of life', it does not mean we lose our salvation. It means that we have no reward in God's sight.

Interestingly, we can even have a 'name' or a reputation in the demonic world. See Acts 19:13-15. Demons knew all about Paul, because he was such a threat to them. God honours Paul's name so much that the devil takes note of Paul.

The unsaved in the sight of God don't have a 'name' in heaven.

Proverbs 18:10

The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

We can take refuge in God's name. This means we can take refuge in who God is – his nature, his power, his character.

The Bible tells us about the many different names of God too. The greatest of these is Yahweh (translated LORD (capital letters) in the English Old Testament). Another key name is Adonai (translated

Lord (small letters) in the English Old Testament). Adonai means Sovereign One, or King. And then there is the word El which is simply translated God.

The name LORD or Yahweh is the name God got at the Exodus. God tells Moses that his name is 'I am who I am' (v14). This is a bit long so God himself immediately shortens it to 'I am' (v14). Then he modifies the name 'I am' to 'LORD' (v15) or 'Yahweh'. The word 'Yahweh' means 'To be'. In other words God's name is 'I am who I am', which is summarized as 'I am', which is modified to 'Yahweh'. But what does the name 'Yahweh' mean? The confusing thing is that the name 'Yahweh' is used of God before Exodus 3:14. Why does God place special emphasis on it now? Two other verses in the Bible help us come to an answer. Exodus 6:2,3 says, 'I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name The LORD I did not make myself known to them. And Nehemiah 9:9-10 says, 'When you took them out of Egypt you got for yourself a name, which we use to this day'. These verses highlight that the reason God at this time in history brings emphasis to the name Yahweh is that he is at this point going to reveal its meaning to Moses and the Israelites. Before this time it was a name that had no meaning. But now the meaning of Yahweh emerges: the name Yahweh captures what God does in the Exodus events. We can summarize the Exodus-revealed meaning of the name LORD to be the one who redeems his people from bondage by the blood of the lamb, and makes them his own people. In the Exodus events as people trusted in the blood of a sacrificial lamb (see Exodus 12) who died in their place, God's judgment passed over them.

The name Adonai, which means 'Sovereign One' or 'King' is also commonly used. For example we see it used in Isaiah 6, where, though the earthly King Uzziah has died, yet the heavenly King still lives and reigns:

Isaiah 6:1, 3

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

In verse 1 God is called Adonai (translated the Lord). In verse 3 God is called Yahweh (translated LORD). Interestingly, in verse 2, we see God called 'the LORD Almighty' (which can also be translated 'the LORD is hosts'). This refers to God having a multiplicity of powers and potentialities within himself. (As we read the Old Testament, we should read whether LORD or Lord is used because there is often a nuance of meaning.)

There are many different combination names of God, using the word 'El' (which means 'God') especially in the book of Genesis. For example, there is:

- El Shaddai. No one knows what 'Shaddai' means, but the name El-Shaddai is always used when someone is in a desperate situation. See these texts, all in Genesis: 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14 and 48:3. It is translated 'God Almighty' in most English translations.

- 'El Olam' (Genesis 21:33) which means 'The God forever'.
- El Lahai' (Genesis 16:13) which means 'The God who sees me'. Hagar felt abandoned and rejected by everyone, but God saw her, and she named God this.

There are different combination names of God, using the name Yawheh: For example there is ...

- Yahweh Jireh (Genesis 22:14) which means 'The LORD will provide'. In this story, God provides a substitute-sacrifice so that Isaac doesn't have to die. Interestingly, Hudson Taylor, the missionary pioneer into China lived on that name of God. He made it the motto of his mission.
- Yahweh Nissi (Exodus 17:15) which means 'The LORD my banner'. It refers to the flag of encouragement and hope that an army would hold high while in battle.
- Yahweh Shalom (Judges 6:24) which means 'The LORD my peace'.
- Yahweh Rapha (Exodus 15:26) which means 'The LORD who heals me'.
- Yawheh Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6) which means 'The LORD my righteousness'. This is fulfilled in Jesus, where Christ became our righteousness (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). We, as Christians, don't approach God on the basis of our own righteousness, but on the basis of Christ's righteousness.

We can cling to these names. As we pray to God, we remind ourselves of his name, and his nature. We need to learn to 'live on God'. We can cling to the names of God in prayer. Whatever our situation is, we can call on that aspect of God's nature (i.e. a different name) that we most need.

For more information about other names of God in the Old Testament, go to www.blueletterbible.org/study/misc/name_god.cfm.

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 3

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATIONS & PICTURES OF GOD/ THE CHARACTER OF GOD

TALK 7

Contents:

- E. The pictures or metaphors of God
- F. God's character – 12 descriptions

E. THE PICTURES OR METAPHORS THAT THE BIBLE USES TO HELP US THINK ABOUT GOD

There are three kinds of 'pictures' of God in the Bible:

1) Impersonal pictures of God – God is spoken of as a rock, a fire, a pillar of cloud, a light, dew, a tree and much more.

2) Animal pictures of God – In the Bible, God is compared with an eagle, a lion, a dove, a lamb, a leopard, a bear, a mother-hen and more. Here is an example:

Hosea 13:7-8

So I [God] will come upon them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk by the path. Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open.

3) Personal pictures of God – e.g. In different parts of the Bible God is described as a king, a shepherd, a father, a husband, a mother and more. Here is an example:

Hosea 2:14-19

Therefore I [God] am now going to allure her [Israel]; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her ... There she will sing as in the days of her youth ... In that day you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master'. ... I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice and in love and compassion.'

We should recognize and ponder these pictures. Each picture tells us something about God. We must never press any picture or metaphor too far, but there is an aspect of God revealed in the picture-language the Bible uses to describe who God is, and how he relates to us.

F. THE CHARACTER / CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

We are to live on the character of God. We are to live on God. God's character is to affect how we relate to him and how we live. We will look at 30 different characteristics of God that are revealed in the Bible. As we will see, each aspect of God's character has implications for our lives.

1) God is spirit

God is real, but he is not material. God doesn't have a body. That means that place, posture and ritual are relatively unimportant in how we relate to God. Posture (e.g. kneeling, hands up) is spoken of in the Bible but it is relatively unimportant. Much more important is the state of our hearts / spirits before God.

The fact that God is spirit means that he deals with our spirits. Our relationship with him is spirit to spirit, and is energized by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus taught us about God:

John 4:24

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth.

2) God is one

God is one. He is a unity. He is integrated. There is no duplicity in him. He doesn't have one standard for one person, and another for another person. And as the following verse shows, the fact that he is one shows that he doesn't have one way of salvation for one set of people (i.e. the Jews) and another way of salvation for another set of people (i.e. the non-Jews / Gentiles):

Romans 3:28-30

²⁸ For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from observing the law. ²⁹ Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since God is one, and will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

The belief that there are many different ways to salvation, and to God, is really a form of polytheism (the belief in many different gods). The reason there is only one way to salvation is because there is only one God. There is only one spiritual disease (i.e. sin) and there is only one cure (i.e. Jesus). We all have the same need: we need to find a way as sinners to be reconciled to a holy God.

Romans 10:12

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him

The offer of salvation is available to all. There is one way to salvation: to call on the one Lord Jesus and to receive the rich blessing of his grace.

3) God is self-sufficient

God is independent. He doesn't need us. He didn't create us because he needed us. God was happy before he created the world. We need him but he doesn't need us. He depends upon nothing for his existence.

Acts 17:24-28

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Verses 27-28 tell us that we need him. He wants us to reach out for him (v27), and to acknowledge that in him we live and move and have our being (v28). But verses 24-26 make it clear that God does not need us. He is the source of all life, even providing the air we're breathing (v25), as well as our existence in a specific place and time (v26).

If God did not create us because he needed us, the why did he create us? Firstly, he created us for the joy or fun of it. Secondly, he created us as an expression of overflowing love. He doesn't need our love (although he does want our love). Being the tri-une God of love, who experienced loving relationship within himself (Father, Son and Spirit), he created us out of love.

4) God is unchangeable

This is a controversial point, because 'things happen in the history of God'. When God sent his Son to this world for example, something happened in God's history. But he is unchanging in this sense: his character does not change. He is not one thing one day, and another thing another day. His life, his character, his promises, his habits and his purposes do not change.

Also, his covenant of grace to us does not change. For example:

Malachi 3:6

I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

In this verse, we see God calling the Israelites 'the descendants (or sons) of Jacob'. Jacob was a deceitful manipulator of people and events. You never knew where you really stood with him. So when God reminds them that they are Jacob's descendants he is referring to their inconsistency, their tendency to change. Yet God reminds them that he does not change. We can know where we stand with him. Thankfully, if we are in a covenant of grace with him, as Jacob was, we can be sure that he will not change toward us, even though we change toward him.

In God's unchangeable way of relating to us, we find peace and security.

2 Timothy 2:12-13

If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

As we read this verse, we expect Paul to write, 'if we are faithless, he will be faithless toward us' but wonderfully Paul reminds us that God's faithfulness to us is not dependent on our faithfulness toward him, for he cannot disown himself. He cannot change his unchangeable character. He stays with us, though we stray from him.

Also, his oath does not change. Now and then in the Bible God swears on oath. This means that he makes up his mind and he will not change what he has sworn. If God swears against you, you lose something that you cannot regain. If he swears a promise to you, you gain something that you cannot lose. Here are some examples of oaths in the Bible ...

1) God's oath to David. Have you ever wondered why Saul lost his kingdom (1 Samuel 12:26) though David did not lose his kingdom, yet David did worse things than Saul did? The answer is that God swore an oath to David.

Psalm 89:35-36

Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness— and I will not lie to David— that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun

2) God's oath against the Israelites. Once God swears against the Israelites (see Numbers 14:20-44), nothing can be done to change his mind. Their persistent lack of faith causes God to swear that none of them, except Joshua and Caleb, will enter the Promised Land. Then, filled with regret, they repent, and try to take the Promised Land – but they fail. It is too late. God has made up his mind.

3) God's oath toward Christ and those he intercedes for. Wonderfully, God made an oath to Christ that he will be high priest forever. This oath benefits us if we trust in Christ as our mediator because he accomplishes for us an eternal salvation:

Hebrews 7:20-25

And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he (Christ) became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.' " Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

What a privilege to live on the unchangeable-ness of God and Christ. 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8).

5) God is powerful

A wonderful example of living on God's power is found in Jeremiah 32. Jeremiah is in prison, and the once-Jewish land has been possessed by the Babylonians. All the Jews are exiled into Babylon. There is, from a human point of view, little chance that the land will be reclaimed. Yet God tells him to buy some land in faith that one day this land will be reclaimed by the Jews. He does it, and then he prays:

Jeremiah 32:16-17

"After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD: "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."

He trusts in God's power. He clings to God's power to fulfil his promises, even in the face of great obstacles. He reminds himself of God's creative power.

Wonderfully, God fulfils his promise decades later! (See Daniel 5 for how God overthrows Babylonian rule, and replaces it with Persian rule. And the Persians were more willing to let the Israelites return home. Jeremiah's descendents would have moved into the property Jeremiah had bought.)

We too should live on God's power. God will keep his promises. He will overcome all obstacles to the fulfilment of his purposes, even if he seems to take his time.

6) God is living (38:20)

God is alive. He can act. He can surprise us. He can do unexpected things. We serve the Living God. Because God is living we can enjoy and experience his life. We can experience a dynamic relationship with him ...

Psalm 84:2

My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Part of the gospel message is that instead of trusting in lifeless idols, people should trust in the Living God:

Acts 14:15

Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

7) God is personal

This aspect of God is linked to the previous aspect of God. Since God is living, God is also personal. God has personality. God is not an 'it'. Our God is 'he'. We can relate to him. He has a mind, plans, a will.

Many scholarly false teachers have taught that God is not personal, but rather is the 'ground of our being'. They wrongly claim he is impersonal. But, the reason we can pray to God is because he is personal. We couldn't pray to some force or energy.

The only faith that survives is one that is faith in a living God, a God we can relate to.

Jeremiah 10:5, 8-10

Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good." They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols. Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. What the goldsmith and engraver have made is then dressed in blue and purple— all made by skilled workers. But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King.

8) God is vast and present everywhere

Psalms 139:7-12

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
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.

Genesis 28:16

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

God is always there. When we are in trouble, or in sin, God is still there. Anywhere in the universe, God is there. And he is present to us. He sees us. He knows us.

9) God is eternal

Psalm 90:1-2

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

10) God is wise

Jeremiah 10:12

But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.

There is a difference between God's knowledge and his wisdom. His wisdom is the skill with which he does things. It is the application of his knowledge. God skilfully made the universe. He 'founded it by his wisdom'.

In the same way, God wants us to be wise. He wants us to apply the knowledge we have. Being wise is about living skilfully. We are to access and apply God's wisdom in our lives.

11) God is truthful

Titus 1:2

... God, who does not lie ...

1 John 5:20

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

God is true. He does not lie. He cannot lie. There is no deceit inside of him. He is also true in that he has a perfect grasp of the truth. He understands all things as they really are. And he is true in the sense that he is real. He is not a made-up God. He is the God who is really there.

12) God knows everything

God knows everything. He knows the past, the present and the future. He works all things according to his plan.

There are some heretical theologians that deny that God knows the future. They misquote texts. It is called 'open theism'. It is the belief that God waits upon us as we use of our free will in order to see what happens in the future. But there are problems with 'open theism':

1) It is not biblical. God often tells the future with precise detail in the Bible. For example, hundreds of years before it happens, God tells the Jews that one day they will be in exile, but that a man called Cyrus (who turns out to be the Persian empire) will set them free (see Isaiah 45:1). Idols can't tell the future – only God can.

2) It is really an attack on predestination (the belief that God chooses and knows whom he will save long in advance) beginning a long way back. Some people don't like the thought that God pre-determines things, so they try do away with this doctrine by attacking the belief that God even knows the future.

3) It is an exploitation of the Bible's anthropomorphism (when the Bible talks about God in a human way). For example, the Bible speaks of God's eyes, ears, and breathing. Similarly when God says 'I remember' or 'Now I know what's in your heart' (e.g. Genesis 22:12) it is using human language. But it is picture language. Of course, God doesn't forget or wander what we're really like. But when the Bible uses human language to describe how God relates to us, it is more to help us relate to God. It is not doctrinal teaching about God. Open theists exploit this human picture language of God, and try teach doctrine from it.

4) It overlooks the mystery of God. Just because we can't understand or explain something does not mean it is not true. Whenever we try get a firm explanation for something the Bible does not explain, we are in danger of heresy. It is better to say, 'I don't know. That is a mystery.' We believe what God reveals to us. We don't believe because we can understand it. Surely if God is God he needs to be beyond our capacity to comprehend. We live in a world of mystery. The God who made everything is himself a God of mystery. The Bible teaches that God determines the future. And yet it also teaches that we have free choice, to a degree, to determine our own futures. How to reconcile these two truths is a mystery. We are to just accept both truths, even though we struggle to reconcile them.

THE TEACHING ABOUT GOD, PART 4

THE CHARACTER OF GOD CONT.

TALK 8 (FIRST HALF OF TALK ONLY: UP TILL 29:45)

Contents:

- F (cont'd): God's character, 17 more descriptions (0:01)

13) God is faithful

God keeps his promises. God keeps his covenant. He is not like people who let us down. There is no inconsistency in him. We can know where we stand with him.

Numbers 23:19

God is not a human, that he should lie, nor a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

14) God is love (1:30)

Not 'love is God', but 'God is love'. Some people think that wherever love is, God is. The problem with this is that we tend to define God according to our definition of love. Rather God is the one who defines love. The Scriptures teach that God's love expresses itself in the sacrificial death of Christ:

1 John 4:9-10

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.

15) God is merciful

1 Chronicles 21:13

David said to God, 'I am in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord; for his mercy is very great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.'

16) God is gracious

Deuteronomy 7:7,8

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than the other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery.

17) God is patient

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

18) God is compassionate.

2 Corinthians 1:3

God is ... the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles.

We especially see God's compassion evidenced in Jesus. Matthew 9:36 tells us that 'when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them'. Our suffering and our ignorance of God pain him.

19) God is good

Mark 10:18

No one is good, except God.

20) God is holy

Revelations 4:8

Each of the four living creatures – day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'

21) God is righteous

Isaiah 11:4-5

With righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. ... Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Deuteronomy 32:4

He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong – good and upright is he.

The letter to the Romans explores the theme of God's righteousness in great detail. In chapters 1:1-3:20 it explores the need for our righteousness, since we are unrighteous. In chapter 3:21 till end of chapter 4 it speaks of how God justifies us, declaring us righteous in his sight. Chapters 5-8 expounds our position as the righteous people of God. Salvation starts with God declaring us righteous in God's sight. Salvation continues as God actually transforms our character, working righteousness in us.

Interestingly, many of God's character traits can be evidenced in our lives, and other traits can't. Theologians sometimes speak of God's communicable (what can be shared by us) qualities, and his incommunicable (what can't be shared by us) qualities. The Bible teaches that we become like the god / God we worship (see 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Many of these characteristics of God begin to appear in us, as we live upon them. Some can never appear in us – for example, we will never share some of God's transcendent qualities like omniscience (all-knowing), omnipotence (all-powerful), and omnipresence (present everywhere). But others such as the ones listed from point 13 to point 21 can be experienced and expressed through us. Wonderfully, many of the characteristics of God become our characteristics. He rubs off on us as we live on him.

22) God is angered

God is love. God is not anger however. Love is who he is. Anger is how he responds to our sin. Anger is God's not liking things that should not be liked. Because God cares so much for the world and the people he created, he is angered when wickedness and hardness of heart prevail. In this sense, anger is one aspect of his love.

Romans 2:5

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Because sin angers God, Jesus needed to die on the cross. The theological word for the way Jesus turns away God's anger toward our sin, is 'propitiation'. Jesus' sacrifice bore the anger of God. He turned God's anger away from us, by carrying God's anger upon himself on the cross.

23) God is jealous

Deuteronomy 32:21

They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols.

God does not tolerate rivals. He seeks to protect his love relationship with us. He doesn't want us flirting with other gods.

24) God is exalted/high

Job 37:23

The Almighty is beyond our reach, and exalted in power.

Some of the descriptions of God are so grand, so massive, that we can hardly get our minds around them. God is God on high. He is above everything. From on high, he sees it all and controls it all.

25) God is excellent

Isaiah 25:1

For in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.

Psalms 12:6

The words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay seven times.

26) God is great

Daniel 7:9-10

Thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were ablaze. A river of fire was flowing coming out from before him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.'

27) God is beautiful

Revelations 1:16,17

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.

28) God is glorious

This is God's shining character. It is visible. In heaven we will see the radiating shining glory of God. It is the visibility of his character.

However, we cannot see God himself. The stuff we see (think of all the visual manifestations of God in the Bible – cloud, fire etc) is not God himself. The visual stuff is really angels that represent God.

He makes his angels ... flames of fire (see Hebrews 1:7).

God's glory shone in the Holy of Holies. But the high priest who went in had to first fill the place with smoke so that he would be shielded from the sight of God.

Generally, while on earth, we only see the glory of God by faith. We don't commonly see anything with the naked eye. We perceive it in our hearts with the help of the Spirit:

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory ...

2 Corinthians 4:16

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

We're meant to share the glory of God. This is how God created us. When humanity was first made, we were shining with holiness. But all sinned, and lost the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Salvation is all about getting our glory back. Sanctification (the process of change) is all about being transformed from degree of glory to the next (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christ himself, as a man, was the perfect image of God (Hebrews 1:3). To see Jesus on earth was to see God's glorious character.

As we fellowship with Christ, we are changed from one degree of glory to another.

29) God is happy

Psalm 149:4-9

For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy in their beds.

1 Timothy 6:15

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of king

God is 'makarios' (Greek for 'happy' or 'blessed'). God is the 'blessed' God. He is perfectly happy to be the way he is. As we get close to him, and in his will, his happiness will be in us.

One of the ways God makes us happy is by letting us know that we were made as God wanted us to be made (see Jeremiah 1:4-7). God made no mistakes with our bodies, nor in where and when we were born, nor in the parents we were born to. Happiness is being in the will of God. Think of great, happy people like Florence Nightingale or Hudson Taylor – they were true to the way God made them. 'To thine own self (the self God has made) be true'.

God's Sabbath rest was God taking the time to enjoy his world:

Genesis 1:31, 2:2

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good ... By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

We too are invited to take the time to enjoy God, and his character, and his world.

And we need to refuse to copy each other's methods. We're all unique. Think of the Hebrews 11 list of the 40 people God used – God used them in different ways. Still today, we have distinct callings. We need to accept our distinct calling. This is the way to happiness.

Let us live on God's character. Jesus died to 'bring us to God' (1 Peter 3:18). Because of Christ, we can live on God. We begin to take on some of his characteristics. We participate in his divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).