Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God: Is He? Who Is He?
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1351

I. INTRODUCTION

A. God Is the Eternal Creator

Psalm 90:2 says, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." That verse contains great doctrinal truth. "Thou art God" tells us that God is the only God. "From everlasting to everlasting" tells us that God is eternal. And "before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world" tells us that God is the Creator.

B. God Is a Merciful Refuge

Moses, the author of Psalm 90, contrasted the eternal character of God to the frailty of man. Verse 10 says, "The days of our years are three-score years and ten [70 years]; and if, by reason of strength, they be fourscore [80] years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

In verse 1 Moses says, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." When faced with their own inadequacies and frailties, the people of Israel realized they had strength only when they sought refuge in God's strength.

Although they were God's people, the nation needed God's mercy. So Moses prayed, "Satisfy us early with thy mercy" (v. 14).

C. God Is a Just Judge

God is not only the merciful benefactor of the godly, but also the judge of the ungodly. Psalm 90:7 refers to the terrible power of God's anger and wrath.

Psalm 90 pictures God as the eternal Creator who blesses the righteous and punishes the unrighteous. We who accept God and His revelation agree with that portrait, but many contend that Christians have invented that God. Some go to the extreme of claiming that everyone who is religious has merely postulated their religion or been victimized by some forefather who did. In their opinion

there is no supernatural realm.

I. GOD - IS HE?

A. The Debate on God's Existence

1. The invention of God

Sigmund Freud, the progenitor of modern psychoanalysis, believed that man created God, not the other way around. In his book The Future of an Illusion (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1961), Freud said that man desperately needs security because we have deep-seated fears from living in a threatening world in which we have little control over our circumstances. He believed we invented God as a protective father, and suggested three reasons for our doing so.

a. Fear of nature

Man fears the unpredictability, impersonality, and ruthlessness of nature. Because we all see the frightful reality of disease, famine, and disasters against which we have only a nominal defense, Freud assumed that we postulate a supernatural being who can deliver us.

A good illustration of that is a native who lives on a volcanic island. Suddenly he hears rumblings and the ground begins to shake. He walks outside his hut and sees lava blowing out the top of the volcano. He realizes that shoring up his hut and comforting his wife and children won't help. Since there seems to be no way out, he resorts to looking for a supernatural being to save him from the terror of nature.

b. Fear of relationships

Because we often feel used by other people, Freud assumed that we conjured up a divine umpire--a cosmic God with a super whistle who ultimately stops play and penalizes people for what they have done. We all want someone who can right the wrongs of injustice.

c. Fear of death

Freud claimed that we want to find a heavenly Father who will take us to a happy place, which we call heaven. We don't want to face the fact that life may end one day.

Freud's view of God is that there is no God, except the one that is a figment of our imagination. There is no proof for his indefensible hypothesis, yet myriads have believed it.

2. The elimination of God

Freud's view of religion is rather simplistic. A careful examination of human religions reveals that the gods are rarely of the delivering kind, but usually of an oppressive nature that needs continual appeasement. I disagree with Freud; I don't believe that man has invented God. If man had his way he would rather that God did not exist.

The first thing Adam and Eve did after they sinned was hide from God (Gen. 3:8). To be free from a God who calls sinners into accountability has been a constant goal for mankind throughout history. Romans 1 tells us that all men and women know that God exists "because that which may be known of God is manifest in them" (v. 19). "They knew God" (v. 21), but "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (v. 28). Man has not made God; man wishes that God did not exist.

The gods spawned by false religions are not protecting gods; they are fearful gods. Women in India who drown their babies in the Ganges River don't think of their god as a savior--they see it as a fearful ogre they must appease. If man invents gods, he sure invents the wrong kinds! Such gods are actually a representation of real demonic activity.

B. The Defense of God's Existence

Evidence for God's existence is abundant. To postulate that there is no God and invent a theory that man made God ignores valid theological arguments for the existence of God. Theologians propose many reasons for believing in the existence of God.

1. The arguments

a. Teleological

The Greek word teleios means "perfection," "result," or "end." When we look at something that has been finished or perfected, we conclude it's resulting design must have had a designer. You can't take your watch apart, put all the pieces in a bag, shake it, and then hear the watch tick. A piano didn't just happen to come together because an elephant ran into a tree while a harpist was playing his harp on one of the limbs! Design implies a designer.

b. Ontological

Ontos is a Greek participle from the verb translated "to be." This argument reasons that since the mind of man can conceive of an absolutely perfect Being, that implies the reality and existence of that Being.

c. Aesthetical

Because there is beauty and truth in the world, it is logical to assume that somewhere in the universe is a standard on which beauty and truth are based.

d. Volitional

Because man faces a myriad of choices and exercises volition, it is logical to assume that there must be an infinite will somewhere. The world exists as an expression of that will.

e. Moral

That we know there is right and wrong suggests the necessity of an absolute standard.

f. Cosmological

(1) Examining the equations

Cosmology is the argument of cause and effect. The world and universe exist, and we conclude that someone made it. That makes more sense than believing that everything came out of nothing--that no one time nothing equals all things--which is essentially what the theory of evolution says. As we carefully examine the world, we learn more about the One who made it.

(2) Examining the effects

(a) The cause of limitless space must be infinite.

(b) The cause of endless time must be eternal.

(c) The cause of perpetual motion must be powerful.

(d) The cause of complexity must be omniscient.

(e) The cause of consciousness must be personal.

(f) The cause of feeling must be emotional.

(g) The cause of will must be volitional.

(h) The cause of ethical values must be moral.

(i) The cause of religious values must be spiritual.

(j) The cause of beauty must be aesthetic.

(k) The cause of righteousness must be holy.

(l) The cause of justice must be just.

(m) The cause of love must be loving.

(n) The cause of life must be living.

Our world gives evidence that there must be a God who is the cause of all those qualities, which are merely reflections of His character. And the Bible substantiates every one.

Based on all those arguments you would think that anyone who doesn't believe that God exists is ignorant. Psalm 14:1 supports that reasoning: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (cf. Ps. 53:1).

The Despair of Life Without God

I am convinced of the existence of God not only because we have no other way to explain anything in the world, but also because we need Him so badly. That need is illustrated by the story of an atheist who, in the midst of a difficult situation, began to call to God. Someone who knew he was an atheist heard him and said, "Why are you calling on God?" The atheist replied, "If there isn't a God, there ought to be for times like this!"

People who deny the existence of God often lead lives of great despair. If you study the well-known philosophical atheists and deists of the world, you will see that many developed a bleak outlook on life here and after death.

1. Voltaire--An aristocratic woman who was old and blind wrote to Voltaire in the hopes that he could dispel her pessimistic view of life and offer some comfort. He replied, "I think we [human beings] are indeed contemptible creatures.... I exhort you to enjoy as much as you can life, which isn't much" (Norman L. Torrey, The Spirit of Voltaire [N.Y.: Columbia University, 1938], p. 216).

2. H.G. Wells--"I do not believe I have any personal immortality.... I feel I have to do something ... and then I am finished, and finished altogether. Then my substance returns to the common lot" (The

Undying Fire and Philosophical and Theological Speculations, "First and Last Things" [N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925], p. 261).

3. Mark Twain--Samuel L. Clemens became notoriously cynical in the later years of his life. His What Is Man? And Other Philosophical Writings [L.A.: University of California, 1973]) contains some of the most disparaging statements against mankind ever written. At the heading of the third chapter of The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) he wrote, "Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world." He also wrote, "Man was made at the end of the week's work when God was tired" (Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain: A Bography, vol. 3 [N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1912], p. 1195).

4. Bertrand Russell--"That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins--all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand" ("A Free Man's Worship" in Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell [N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1927], p. 3).

The evidence shows that God exists. How sad it is for people to forsake the evidence and come to such a bleak outlook.

2. The assurance

In marked contrast, the results of faith in God are bright. The psalmist said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4). He also said, "Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasure for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

II. GOD - WHO IS HE?

A. His Person Defended

Albert Einstein admitted to a cosmic force in the universe but concluded that it is unknowable (Cosmic Religion [N.Y.: Covici, Friede, 1931], pp. 47-48). He was mistaken.

The Bible reveals that God is a Person. It uses personal titles to describe Him: He is called a father, a shepherd, a friend, and a counselor. The Bible also uses personal pronouns to refer to God. The Hebrew and Greek texts refer to God as He, never it. And the Bible shows God to be a person because He thinks, acts, feels, and speaks--He communicates. All the evidence of Scripture indicates He is a person, and all the evidence of creation and our personhood indicates we came from Him.

B. His Person Defined

1. God is spirit

a. Numbers 23:19--God's spiritual nature is implied by the statement: "God is not a man."

b. John 4:24--"God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (NASB).

c. Luke 24:39--Jesus said, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones." God doesn't have a body.

Accommodating the Message to the Man

Even though God doesn't have a body, the Bible says such things as, "The eyes of the Lord ... run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech. 4:10), "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem?" (Isa. 50:2), and "Thou hast a mighty arm" (Ps. 89:13). We call those descriptions anthropomorphisms . That word comes from two Greek words: anthropos (man) and morphe (form). References to a human form attributed to God are an accommodation God has made to our finite understanding.

Let me caution you to avoid using those anthropomorphisms to reduce God to a man, like some of the cults have done. Psalm 91:4 says God covers us with His feathers, but that doesn't mean He's a bird. God is not a man or a bird--He is spirit.

First Timothy 1:17 refers to God as invisible. No man has ever seen God (John 1:18). In Exodus 33:20 God says, "No man [can] see me, and live." Nevertheless in the Old Testament God represented Himself by the Shekinah--the divine light, fire, and cloud. In the New Testament He represented Himself in the form of Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 18). Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). God may choose to manifest Himself in some way by limiting Himself to something visible, but that is not the totality of His Person.

2. God is one

There is only one God. Moses made that clear in the following statement, the key to Israel's religious convictions: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). The people of Israel lived in the midst of polytheistic societies, yet they were to believe in only one God.

a. Defended by Jesus

Jesus claimed to be God--does that mean He claimed to be another God? No. He reiterated what Moses said about the oneness of God: "The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel: The Lord thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:29-30). If Jesus were claiming that He was another God, He would never have said that. He would have had to say, "Split your allegiance between the two of us."

When Jesus said we are to love God with undivided commitment, He was agreeing with the Old Testament that there is only one God. But at the same time (though not explicitly in this particular passage), He was claiming to be that very God.

b. Defended by Paul

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul had to solve a problem the Corinthian Christians faced because they lived in a pagan society that worshiped many false gods.

(1) The Corinthians' problem

The people would offer food to their false gods as an act of worship. It was a common practice of the priests to take what food wasn't actually consumed on the altar and sell it in a market they ran outside the temple. Christians who had been saved out of idolatry were offended when they found out that other Christians ate food offered to idols. They especially were offended when fellow believers offered them some at a meal.

(2) Paul's solution

To correct the problem Paul said, "As concerning, therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. 8:4). Paul's argument is that since an idol represents a nonexistent god, there is nothing wrong in eating the food. Then he said, "There is no other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there are gods many, and lords many), but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (vv. 4-6). How can all things be by God the Father, in whom we are, and by the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we are? Because they are one and the same. God is one (1 Tim. 2:5).The

"gods" in Psalm 82

In Psalm 82:6 God says to the rulers of Israel, "Ye are gods." Does that mean there are many gods? No. In speaking to the judges of Israel, God was not referring to their essence but their office. As judges they represented God in judging Israel. They were to judge the people as if God were judging them. Nevertheless the psalmist made it clear that they were not His equal for he immediately said, "But ye shall die like men" (v. 7). It is the Holy God alone he appeals to in saying, "Arise, O God, judge the earth" (v. 8).

3. God is three

God is one yet exists as three distinct persons. That's revealed in the Bible from beginning to end.

a. Implicit evidence in the Old Testament

(1) Genesis 1:1--"In the beginning God." The Hebrew word translated "God" is Elohim. An im ending on a Hebrew means it's plural. Genesis 1 presents a singular God who is expressed as a plurality.

(2) Numbers 6:24-26--"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." The three references to the Lord could be an allusion to the Trinity.

Other implicit evidence is studying how the word "Lord" is used in Genesis 19:24 and Psalm 110.

b. Explicit evidence in the New Testament

(1) Matthew 3:16-17--As Jesus was being baptized by John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. The Father replied, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). We see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together in the same scene.

(2) John 14:16-17--Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth."

(3) 1 Corinthians 12:4-6--"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all."

(4) 2 Corinthians 13:14--"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen."

(5) 1 Peter 1:2--Peter said believers are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

God is one, yet He is three. That is a mystery, yet it is not without parallel in our experience. An egg is one, yet it consists of three parts: a shell, a white, and a yolk. Water is one, yet it exists in three states: solid, liquid, and gas. Nevertheless those are imperfect illustrations because God is greater than we can fully comprehend.

III. GOD - WHAT IS HE LIKE?

A. He Is Unchanging (Immutable)

1. The concept

a. Psalm 102:26--In explaining the difference between the heavens and God the psalmist said, "They shall perish, but thou shalt endure.... Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."

b. Malachi 3:6--God said, "I am the Lord, I change not."

c. James 1:17--"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

2. The contrast

Change is either for the better or for the worse. Yet both are inconceivable with God because He doesn't change. That sets Him apart from everything else because everything changes.

a. The heavens change

The heavens move about, following their courses. Scientists tell us there are exploding stars--new worlds are being created all the time. Revelation 6-19 gives us a drastic picture of the extreme changes the heavens will undergo until they are eventually dissolved by fire (Rev. 8:12; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10, 12). The stars will fall, the sun will go out, the moon will turn a bloody hue, and the heavens will roll up like a scroll (Rev. 6:12-17).

b. The earth changes

Man has been changing the face of the earth with his bulldozers and the atmosphere with pollution. Revelation 6- 19 details the changes the earth will undergo: the seas will be polluted, plant life will die, and people will die. Earthquakes and hailstorms will drastically change the face of the earth (Rev.

6:1-11; 8:3-11; 9:13-19). The earth was changed once by a flood; it will be changed again as it is consumed with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:6-7).

c. The ungodly change

What unbelievers now believe is a happy or acceptable way to live they will find was a tragic existence when they realize they will spend an eternity without God.

d. The saints change

There are times when our love for Christ burns and we obey Him, but there are other times when it smolders and we disobey Him. David said, "The God of my rock; in him will I trust" (2 Sam. 22:3). But he also said, "I shall now perish ... by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. 27:1).

e. The demons change

Jude 6 says that the demons "kept not their first [angelic] estate."

Everything in the universe changes except God and Christ, which reveals His equality with God. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

3. The comfort

What does the unchanging character of God mean to us as Christians? Comfort. Since God loves us, He loves us forever. Since He forgave us, He forgave us forever. Since He saved us, He saved us forever.

a. 2 Peter 3:9--"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise."

b. Romans 11:29--"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." That means God doesn't change His mind.

c. 2 Timothy 2:13--"If we believe not, yet he abides faithful; he cannot deny himself."

d. Jeremiah 31:3--God said of Israel, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

e. Isaiah 54:10--God also said of Israel, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed."

f. Isaiah 46:10--God said, "My counsel shall stand."

For us to be rightly related to an unchanging God we have to undergo a drastic change. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

4. The confusion

Several Scriptures such as Genesis 6:6, Amos 7:6, and Jonah 3:10 say that God repented. Yet Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that he lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." How do we reconcile those Scriptures? We know that God Himself doesn't change (Mal. 3:6). However, He may will something to change under certain circumstances.

a. Didn't God change His mind about Nineveh?

God commissioned Jonah to warn Nineveh of impending judgment because of its wickedness (Jonah 1:2-3). Jonah rebelled, but God got him there through a miraculous ride inside a large fish (1:17; 2:10). When he arrived, Jonah preached and the people repented (3:1-5). Verse 10 says, "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he said that he would do unto them, and he did it not." But God didn't change; Nineveh did.

b. Didn't God change His mind about creating man?

When God looked on the pre-flood civilization, "it repented the Lord that he had made man on earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (Gen. 6:6-7). God made man to do good, but he did evil. Yet God Himself hasn't changed; He continues to reward good and punish evil.

You can't blame the sun for melting wax and hardening clay. The problem is in the substance of those objects, not the sun. How a man stands before God dictates what happens to him. Have you ever ridden a bike against the wind? It's a struggle until you turn around and coast with the force of the wind. You can't say that the wind changed; you changed in relation to the wind. God never changes. He will continue to reward good and punish evil. How you view what He does depends on where you are within His grace and will.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Bible says to the believer, "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19). But to the unbeliever God says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." God never changes. For some that truth brings great joy. For others it ought to cause fear and a desire to repent from evil.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was Freud's view of God in relation to man?

2. What is the nature of the gods man invents?

3. What is man's natural response to the true God (Rom. 1:28)?

4. Cite the theological arguments for the existence of God and give a brief explanation of each.

5. Whom does the Bible identify as a fool (Ps. 14:1)?

6. What is God, according to the evidence of Scripture?

7. Why does Scripture attribute physical characteristics to God?

8. What was unique about Israel's worship compared to the societies around them?

9. What did Jesus support when He quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5 in Mark 12:29-30?

10. What is significant about 1 Corinthians 8:4-6?

11. Why were the rulers of Israel called "gods" in Psalm 82:6?

12. Cite Old and New Testament Scripture that give evidence for the existence of the Trinity.

13. What aspects of creation make immutability an attribute unique to God?

14. What does God's unchanging character mean to the godly?

15. Explain the circumstances when the Bible says God repented. Do those instances mean He changed?

Pondering the Principles

1. The world is full of either philosophic or pragmatic atheists--they either don't believe in God, or if they do, they live as if His existence had no effect on them. In sharing Christ with them, it's helpful to know which kind of atheist they are. Determine how you might alter your presentation of God's truth to match the type of person you're sharing with. For some ideas, compare Stephen's address to the

Jewish religious leaders (Acts 7) and Paul's address to Gentile philosophers (Acts 17:18-34).

2. Jesus' identification with God presupposes His equality with Him. Look up the following verses that discuss the nature their equality and fill in the blanks.

a. To _____ Him was to _____ the Father (John 8:19; 14:7)

b. To _____ Him was to _____ the Father (John 15:23).

c. To _____ Him was to _____ the Father (John 12:44; 14:1).

d. To _____ Him was to _____ the Father (John 12:45; 14:9).

e. To _____ Him was to _____ the Father (John 5:23; 17:5).

f. To _____ Him was to _____ the Father (Matt. 10:40; Mark 9:37).

g. To _____ Him was to _____ the Father (John 8:42; 14:23).

3. We change because we are human. But for the Christian, change need not carry a negative connotation. What kind of change is occurring in us for God's glory (Rom. 8:29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 1:27)? What areas of your life need to change for the pleasure of the Lord?

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