

EQTH105 Basic Bible Doctrine

Unit 2a Who Is the God of the Bible?

Presented by the



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Welcome to Unit 2 where we will be exploring the identity of God. The definition of identity is the fact of being, who or what a person or thing is. So it is the fact of who a person is. And that is a really important thing to study and know about God. In fact, it's the foundation of this course. But many people ask, "Does it really matter what a person believes about God? Isn't it sufficient just to believe sincerely in something?" Well, despite the fact that many people have that outlook, according to the Bible, it is critically important what we believe. In the New Testament, it is always the object of faith, Jesus Christ, and not the faith itself that is stressed. As far as the Bible is concerned, correct belief is crucial. The New Testament teaches that right belief consists of several things.

First, faith must be in God, but not just any god. Faith must be placed only in the God of the Bible. Faith in any other object is insufficient. Second, faith must be placed in God's son, Jesus Christ. It is impossible to have a relationship with the true God apart from the person of Jesus. The Bible says, "But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." [John 1:12] In another verse, it states, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." [1Jo 2:23] According to the Bible, anyone who claims to know God and yet does not believe in Jesus does not know God. You have to have both the Father and the Son.

Third, faith in Jesus is more than merely acknowledging intellectually that he exists or that he is the Lord. James wrote about this type of ineffective faith. He compared it to the belief of demons. "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" The demons know who Jesus Christ is: God the Son, the savior of the world. But merely knowing these things and other facts about Jesus does not do them any good. They have no relationship with him. Biblical faith consists of trusting Jesus as savior, not simply acknowledging his existence with your intellect. It does matter what a person believes. You can believe that a tree will save you. You can believe that good deeds will save you or that going to church will save you. But the Bible says that faith must be placed in God. And not any god will do. Faith must be placed in God's son, Jesus Christ, or else there is no forgiveness. Furthermore, faith is more than just mental assent. The demons know Jesus' identity. To receive Christ as savior, a person must place their trust in him. Only then can a person receive forgiveness.

So with that in mind, let's explore more deeply who exactly is the God of the Bible. Let's talk about this question of identity. The most frequently asked questions about God concern his identity. Who is God? What is he like? Our information about the God of the Bible is derived from four sources: nature, the spirit and mind of humanity, the Bible, and the person of Jesus Christ. From these sources, we can have a basic, though not complete, picture of the nature of God. And while it is difficult to give a simple definition of God, we can have a basic description of his being.

First, God's form is that of a spirit. He is an invisible, eternal spirit. This means that God does not have a body, especially a body as we know it. However, God can reveal himself to humanity in a physical form. The Old Testament does tell us that on certain occasions, God had temporarily revealed himself to humankind in visible form. Third, he is the only God who exists.

There is no other God either more or less powerful who exists anywhere in the universe. The prophet Isaiah records God saying, “To whom then will you liken me, that I would be his equal?” [Isa 40:25] Fourth, God is absolute perfection. We talked about that in the last lesson, the attributes of God being the same thing as the perfections of God. There is nothing lacking in his character or nature. He does not need anything or anyone to exist. He is complete within himself. He is therefore the perfect eternal spirit.

Fifth, the God of the Bible is a personal God. This means that he has intelligence, will, emotions, and self-cognizance. Personal names are used when referring to him. Personal characteristics are also attributed to him. He is not some vague, unknown creative force that has no mind or feelings. Next, God is distinct from his creation. The universe is not a part of God. God is distinct from his creation. When the universe was created, God brought something into existence that had not existed before. And just to clarify, God is not like humans either. Also, God is personally involved in the running of this universe that he created. He did not merely create the universe and then just leave it on its own. Number eight, he is knowable. The good news of Scripture is that human beings can personally know God. Not everything about him, an incomplete picture, to be sure, but we can know him. It is possible, even desirable, to have a personal relationship with the creator of the universe.

A complete definition of God is something that is impossible to do. However, a basic definition of God includes these facts. God is an invisible, personal, eternal spirit who is absolute perfection. He is the only God that has existed or that will ever exist. He is not the same as his creation, but is Lord over it. He is personally involved in the affairs of the universe. And finally, he is noble. It is possible for his creation to have a personal relationship with him.

Now, there is nothing that anyone can know about God’s nature unless he reveals it to humankind. Again, we went over the four ways that this is revealed. But without divine revelation, humanity would be in darkness. Fortunately, the Bible has told us about God’s nature. Let me pause here and restate what we have stated before, and that is, this process of getting to know God is a good thing. It’s a valuable exercise. There are many reasons for this, but let me just focus on two. First, so that we worship an authentic God and not a false one. We need to have an accurate picture of who we are worshiping because the alternative is that we are worshiping a false god, and that is idolatry. Second, this whole question of salvation is based on faith in God, in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Given the fact that accepting Jesus Christ as our savior is the most important decision any person will make, we need to have a pretty clear picture of what or who we are putting our faith in.

So with that being said, let’s look into Scripture and explore four basic descriptions of God’s identity. Number one, as we stated, God is a spirit being. Jesus describes God in this manner: “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” [John 4:24] God is not a spirit. Rather, he is Spirit. Spirit is his nature. He’s not a physical being. Because God has no physical form, Israel was forbidden to make any images of him. As part of the Ten Commandments, we learn, “You shall not make for yourselves an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” [Exo 20:4-6]

Number two, the Bible also says that God is light. “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” [1Jo 1:5] This can refer to the glory and majesty of God. Notice that the Bible does not say that God *has* light. It says he is light. The Bible says that “He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.” [1Ti 6:15-16]

Third, God is love. This is the most popular thing that people know about God, and it also happens to be true. The Bible says that God is love. It says, “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” [1Jo 4:16] Love involves other attributes of God, including grace, kindness, and mercy. But, you know, you can't have one without the other. You can't pick and choose the attributes of God that you like and ignore the rest. The Bible also describes this loving God as a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:29 says, “For our God is a consuming fire.” Fire is not God. God is like fire. The analogy of fire refers to the holiness and absolute righteousness of God's nature. In fact, fire is frequently a symbol of God, and fire is frequently used as a symbol of God and his judgment against sin.

The Bible speaks of a flaming torch and a smoking firepot when God made a covenant with Abraham. It says, “As the sun went down and it became dark, Abraham saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcass.” [Gen 15:17] We also know about the incident at the burning bush where Moses had an encounter with God. “One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. And he went deep into the wilderness near Sinai, the mountain of God. Suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him as a blazing fire in a bush. Moses was astounded because the bush was engulfed in flames, but it didn't burn up. ‘Amazing,’ Moses said to himself. ‘Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go over and see this.’ When the Lord saw that he had caught Moses' attention, God called to him from the bush. ‘Moses, Moses.’ ‘Here I am,’ Moses replied. ‘Do not come any closer,’ God told him. ‘Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.’ Then he said, ‘I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ When Moses heard this, he hid his face in his hands because he was afraid to look at God.” [Exo 3:1-6]

Another example of fire is the account of Elijah and the altar of fire. God's judgment appeared on the altar, and Elijah the prophet taunted the false prophets of Baal. He said, “‘Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!’ And all the people agreed... Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the ditch! And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and cried out, ‘The Lord is God! The Lord is God!’” [1Ki 18:24, 38-39]

Now, the Bible does not attempt to prove God exists or give any definition of God, yet it does describe his nature in four ways. God is spirit. His nature is not flesh and blood. God is light. There is no darkness in him at all. God is love. And finally, God's nature can be compared to a consuming fire. These four descriptions provide some insight into God's nature and character rather than giving us a definition of him.

Now, going back to my earlier point, it is important that those who have believed in Jesus Christ continue to grow in the knowledge of him. There are several crucial reasons why this is so. First of all, the Bible commands believers to know God. It says, "Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth." [Psa 46:10] The Lord said to King Solomon, "And you my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with single mind and willing heart; for the Lord searches every mind, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will abandon you forever." [1Ch 28:9]

Now, as great as that knowledge is, our eternal life depends on it. The Bible defines eternal life as knowing God through the person of Jesus Christ. In John 17:3, we read, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Eternal life, according to the Bible, is entering into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Eternal life begins the moment the relationship starts. Knowing God will help us to love God. It makes sense that we can only love and trust someone as much as we know them. I know that we hear about falling in love at first sight, but the reality is that human beings do not fall in love with complete strangers. The prophet Jeremiah records God saying, "Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord." [Jer 9:23-24]

The more we know about God, the more we can love and obey him. And then the more one knows God intellectually and experientially, the more they can grow spiritually. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen." [2Pe 3:18] The apostle Paul wrote similar thoughts. "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his suffering by becoming like him in his death." [Phl 3:10] One of the interesting side effects of studying to know God better is that it helps us to understand ourselves. Studying God and his identity helps us with a better understanding of our own identity. Before we can appreciate who we are, we need to know who made us and why we are here on the earth. Therefore, the more we learn about God, the more we will be able to learn about ourselves. We'll cover this in greater depth when we study mankind and the human condition.

In the end, true worship can result from an accurate knowledge of the Lord. And isn't that what the world wants, has always wanted? Real, true love. A real relationship in authentic worship? The Bible says, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgment, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord?"

Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

[Rom 11:33-36]

So there are a number of benefits in knowing the one true God. First, a person enters into an eternal relationship with the one true God. Knowledge of God leads to spiritual growth for the believer. When one enters into a relationship with God, then true, authentic worship is possible. Finally, knowing God causes the believer to realize that a day of judgment is coming. This encourages the person to live in light of eternity.