



The Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Adult Bible Class Sunday Evening – Summer Quarter 2023

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Why Study About Who God Is?

When the apostle Paul came to Mar's Hill in Athens he said, "as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). Far too many of those who consider themselves Christians do not really know the God they serve. Just as Paul needed to distinguish the true God of Heaven from the man-made pagan gods of his day, so today Christians need to study the attributes of God to distinguish Him from the imaginary God conceived in the minds of men.

Is the God of the Bible the product of man's imagination? Atheist Robert G. Ingersoll wrote, "An honest god is the noblest work of man." Prat de Lamartine said, "God-but a word invoked to explain the world." Pagan gods are the inventions of mortal men. In his letter to the Romans Paul gave us a motive for man inventing gods to is liking. "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:22-24).

The fact is man would have never invented the God described in the Bible. God is Holy. So holy in fact He nothing to do with sin, cannot even be tempted to sin, and is separated from sinners. Why would man invent a God who is perfect know he is so imperfect. Man is weak when born and weakens as he grows old. Why invent a all-powerful God man is unable to manipulate and control. God is angry with sinners every day and full of wrath. He will condemn impenitent sinner to an eternal Hell of fire. Surely, man would have never wanted a God like this. When men create a God He is someone they can outsmart and manipulate. Who has the same moral weaknesses that plague their existence.

It is not enough for Christians to merely believe that God is, that is, He exists (Heb. 11:6). He must know the God he believes in. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1). If the atheist is a fool for declaring there is no God, how foolish is the Christian who declares there is a God yet does not know who he is.

Many of those who are ignorant of God have the mistaken idea that God is somehow like man in his nature. The image, man paints God to be, is someone who is not appealing. No one would real want such a God to be their friend. Many are losing their faith, not because God has let them down but because they have believed so many lies about who God is. He is not too busy or cruel, vindictive, a liar, blood-thirsty, etc. Others have trivialized God into a kindly grandfather who is so loving He would never condemn even the most wicked man to hell. In this postmodern world God has been given a make-over to make Him more appealing to the masses. God is not anything we want Him to be. Karen Armstrong, a former nun and a fellow of the *Jesus Seminar*, explained how one ought to pursue God, "just keep you mind open and look for God. I like to look for God in other people, in other things, rather than thinking of a being up there."

Yet God was not created in our image. Man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26,27). To know who God is will help us understand ourselves better and who God wants us to be.

The first thing man should discover in his pursuit of who God is, is that He is far greater than any man. To understand and to truly get to know God is a noble pursuit but also a most challenging task. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

How can we worship God in spirit and in truth, if the truth is we do not know the truth about who

God really is? Such worship would be vain. Is it possible to pray to God without understand who it is we are addressing in prayer, thanking, and petitioning? We sing "How Great Thou Art" and "Our God is an awesome God," but do we really know the one we are praising?

"Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). The answer is "NO!" By himself man cannot understand or know the great attributes of God. God has revealed Himself through nature and through the inspired scriptures. In addition, is the God of the Old Testament the same as the God explained in the New Testament.

God is His attributes. Know these attributes is to understand His nature. Through the promises of God we are to be *"partakers of the divine nature"* (2 Peter 1:4). This is not possible if one does not know the nature of the divine. Being like God is something that is learned not instantly obtained the moment one arises out of the waters of baptism.

By knowing God man is better able to know who God is and how He is to live before Him. Peter tells of the great benefits of knowing God. *"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue"* (2 Peter 1:2,3).

There are few things worth bragging about, such as, riches, fame, physical strength or beauty, etc. Jeremiah said, *"let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. 'For in these I delight,' says the Lord"* (Jer. 9:23,24).

A boy was once drawing a picture of God. He was informed that no one knew what God looked like. The boy said, "They will when I get through." Hopefully, when you are through this study you will have a clearer and more detailed picture of who God is.

God Is Eternal

Where did God come from? When did He come into being? The answer is that the question does not even make sense. It is like asking, "What does thunder smell like?" Thunder is a noise and is not in the classification of things that have odor, so the query itself is defective. It is like asking, "Who made the Unmade?" or, "Who created the Uncreated?" One may as well ask, "Who are the parents of the unknown soldier?" If you could answer who his parents were he would no longer be the unknown soldier. Likewise, you cannot answer how old God is or where He came from, because if you did He could not be the eternal God. This line of questioning assumes that everything is subject to the limitations of time and space, and there is nothing outside the limitations of time and space.

The reason we cannot answer these questions is that God is the unmade, Self-Existent One. The most read page of the Bible is probably the first page of Genesis. The first three words on that page are: "*In the beginning ...*" Belief in this self-existent God is the primary foundation of the Christian's faith (Heb. 11:8). If you asked most people what the greatest single defining attribute of God is, they would probably say His power. Yet there is another attribute of God that is the characteristic that makes God most different from us - His Eternity.

God Is

He is the "*Eternal God*" (Dt. 33:27) and the "*everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth*" (Is. 40:28). In fact, the very name of God "Yahweh" means "the Eternal" (Genesis 21:33). When Moses suggested that people would ask him who had sent him to free the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, God told him to say that "I AM THAT I AM" had sent him. (Ex. 3:14). In short, God just is.

God Is Spirit

Humans have flesh and blood and so do animals. Trees and plants are made up of material substance, however God is not like a man. "*God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*" (Numbers 23:19; cf. Matthew 16:17). God does not have a body, consisting of parts and material substance, as we do.

Jesus told the woman at the well, "*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:24). Since God is a spiritual entity, He exists outside of the three-dimensional, physical world in which we live. The things which are seen are temporal; but some things which are not seen are eternal. Time exists when matter exists. Time has even been called the fourth dimension. But God is not matter. Therefore, to ask where God came from is to ask a question that cannot really be applied to God in the first place. He lives in a different dimension than us. Because that dimension has different laws by which it operates, He exists in timelessness and apart of from occupying a physical location.

God Is Infinite

When we say that God is infinite, the meaning is that He is unbounded and unlimited. God cannot be bound or limited in any way. He is not limited by the constraints of time. God is not bound by the confinements of space. No one existed before, after or above Him to limit Him (Isa. 43:10; 44:6). Thus, we cannot apply the limitations of our physical existence to God who is unlimited in His spiritual existence. Peter wrote, "*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*" (2 Peter 3:8). This does not mean that God cannot

tell time. Peter is showing us that God is not bound by or concerned with time as you and I are. He is a timeless being.

Everything, but God, is limited. No number can exist which is truly infinite. All numbers (no matter how many zeros you attach) will be less than eternity, because you can always add another number. Therefore, all numbers are finite or limited. No number can ever be written to encompass eternity. There is a concept called the "googol". It is a one followed by one hundred zeros. That is one large number. However, you can increase the googol to the googol-th power making a "googolplexes." This number, if written out on paper would, fill the Milky Way galaxy. And still, a googolplexes is not infinite. God is infinite. God is beyond googolplexes!

In contrast, man is finite. No creature is infinite. Infinity distinguishes God and sets Him apart from all His creatures. The Psalmist considers man as a cipher, a vapor, a brief moment and as nothing compared to eternity (Ps. 8:4-6; 144:3,4). Because we are so finite, we cannot comprehend the infinite.

God Is Without Beginning or End

Every man, including Adam, had a beginning and an end. We call our beginning our birthday. We have our wedding anniversary which proves we have not always been married. Making funeral arrangements is proof that we know we will not live forever on earth. Every child conceived in the womb and every corpse concealed in a tomb speaks to man's inception and termination. Humans can only think in terms of beginning and ending.

Who made God? No one did. God had no beginning, so God did not need to be made. There never was a time when God began to be. In Isaiah 44:5, Revelation 1:8, Revelation 21:6, and Revelation 22:13, God is called the "first and the last" and the "*Alpha and Omega*" (this is like calling Him the "A" and the "Z"). This doesn't mean He has a beginning and end, but that He is everything--He is A to Z. Daniel 7:13 calls God the "*Ancient of Days*," not the ancient in days. This means that God does not get any older even though He has been alive for all eternity. He is "*From everlasting to everlasting*" (Ps. 90:2). In the middle of a never-ending line exists a small period of time in which we begin and end our lives. God being self-existent, the uncaused Being, has no beginning and will have no end.

Of God, the Psalmist wrote, "*But You are the same, And Your years will have no end*" (Ps. 102:27). God had no end just as He had no beginning. God does not depend upon any of His creatures for anything. He will not die, if He is not fed. He does not need the earth to begin to exist like humans and when the earth ceases to exist He will not come to an end (2 Pet. 3:10,11).

God Is The Eternal Something

We know that from nothing, nothing comes. Also, we know that something does not come from nothing. If there was ever a time when nothing existed than nothing could ever exist. If there was ever a time when something was, than something must have always been. Since things do exist and could not have come from nothing than something must have existed from which came everything. That eternal something is God.

God is the uncaused first cause of everything. It is a natural reaction of time-bound creatures to assign a cause to every effect that we see. We live in the physical realm where every single effect has a cause. It is hard to imagine that first cause because we then must search for what caused the first cause. If God caused all the effects (material universe), where did God come from? What caused Him to exist? If the universe needs a cause, why doesn't God need one too? The atheist Bertrand Russell wrote in his book "Why I am Not a Christian" that if it is true that all things need a cause then God must also need a cause. He concluded from this that if God needed a cause then God was not God (and if God is not God then of course there is no God). There is a God. Therefore, He has no cause.

We are told that an effect cannot be greater than its cause. The cause of the universe must pre-exist and go beyond the universe. This first cause must stand outside of time as we know it in this three dimensional realm. It must be awesomely powerful. God fits the job description. Nothing was made that was not made by Him (Jn. 1:1-3). Consequently, we are compelled to believe either in a self-existing God sufficient to create the universe, or in the universe apparently existing of itself. God must be the first

cause of everything in the universe.

Some atheists who deny the existence of God believe that the universe was not made; it was just "there" forever. As Carl Sagan has said, "If we say that God has always been, why not save a step and conclude that the universe has always been" (Cosmos, p. 257). However, it is easy to demonstrate that matter cannot be eternal in nature. The essential fuel of the universe is hydrogen. If the universe is eternal, why hasn't all the fuel (hydrogen) been used up? Why is there plenty of fuel in the cosmos' gas tank? This fact alone is incompatible with an eternal universe. The Bible makes it very clear that before anything else existed in the universe God was there (Gen. 1:1).

God Is Creator

Who created God? The problem is like asking a student to draw a five-sided circle. The question is self-contradictory. It assumes that everything has been created. God is the Creator of all things and therefore nothing could have created God. "*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*" (John 1:3). This means that everything that was made was made by God. Therefore, no one could have made God (Psalm 90:2). God is the Creator who brought all into being and God is not a created Being.

When Genesis 1:1 states, "*In the beginning,*" time was born at that moment. So, there was a "time" when there was no time or timelessness. The Bible teaches that God created matter, space, and time (Genesis 1:1: "In the Beginning = time; "heavens" = space; "earth" = matter). Time is inseparable from matter and space. The reason my body (matter) cannot be in two different places (space) like Dallas and New York is because I am limited by time. If I could stop time I could go to New York while I was still in Dallas. However, I am limited by time, matter, and space. Since God is not made up of matter (John 4:24), and is not limited by space, He is not bound by time. Instead, He is the Creator of matter, space and time.

God is not restricted, limited, constrained, pushed or hindered by time. Time is His servant, not His master. Time moves by Him. God does not move by time. He never gets in a rush for time and is never pressed for time.

God Is Life

God is the source of all that lives (Ac. 17:24,25; Rom. 11:36). In his sermon on Mars Hill Paul said, "*for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'*" (Ac. 17:28). He alone has life within Himself (Jn. 5:26). He is not like a plant, animal, or human being who needs to be born to have life. He always has had life. Since God is eternal and since all life comes from Him, it follows that He is the author of eternal life (Jn. 3:16; Heb. 5:8-9). God "*lives forever*" (Isaiah 57:15). The great terminator of life, Death, cannot claim Him. In time, all men will die. God is life and in Him is no death or ending.

God Is Omnipresent

Just as God is not limited by time, He is not limited to space. His presence is eternal. He is not local in the sense of being confined to any one particular place (1 Ki. 8:27; Ps. 139:7-10; Pr. 15:3). "*Am I a God near at hand, says the Lord, And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him? says the Lord; 'do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the Lord*" (Jeremiah 23:23,24).

To be present some place you have to occupy space. Even air must occupy space. God is spirit and does not have to occupy space, thus His presence can be anywhere at anytime. There is no such thing as past and future; with him all is present. Paul speaks of God's activities "*before times eternal*" (1 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2). This is how God can hear the prayers of someone in Africa, Australia, Antarctica, and America at the same time. He transcends time and space. "*But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a temple, except to burn sacrifice before Him?*" (2 Chronicles 2:6).

God Is Omnipotent

Is anything too hard for God? No! There is no end to God's infinite power. His power is eternal (Job 36:5; 42:2; Ps. 147:5; Jer. 32:17; Dan. 4:35). He is able to maintain His own existence for eternity. He is omnipotent and all-powerful. His power does not wear out in time. It surpasses time. If God were made whatever made Him would have power and thus He could not be all-powerful. Nothing and no one has ever been or ever will be more powerful than God.

God Is Omniscient

Did you ever meet a know-it-all? In fact, it is impossible to know it all. First, we already have so much information that no one can live long enough to amass all the knowledge that now exists. Secondly, we do not have all the information available to us at this time because we are gaining knowledge in every field of study every single day. God has no such limits. He is omniscient, that is, His knowledge is limitless. There has never been a period of time when God knew more or less. He never learns, and He never forgets. He is everywhere present with all His power of knowing at all time and in every place. He has eternal wisdom (2 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 119:168; 139:1-2; Dan. 2:22).

Eternity Is Beyond our Comprehension

Humans cannot conceive of anything outside of time. You can strain your brain and still not conceive of the timelessness. Man has a time-bound mentality. Can you conceive of time always existing? No! One reason for this is because our minds are controlled and limited by time. Time influences us to set one thing before and another after. We live exclusively in the duration of time, with the past behind us, the present with us, and the future ahead of us. So, we speak of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The idea of time is linear. Second follows second. Minute comes after minute. Hour upon hour. In time we grow older not younger. Once time has passed we cannot go back to it. We can only move forward in time. The concept of existence is chained to the idea of before and after on a time line. God is beyond both the beginning and end of any time line we can create. We have all seen the time lines on charts: early time is on the left and later time is on the right.

Wrapping our minds around the concept of an eternal existence is like an ant solving a murder mystery or a daisy grasping atomic fusion. If God is so great that the heavens cannot contain Him, how is it that our puny minds with limited experience can know all about Him? Our minds are not big enough to fully comprehend. An eternal God is just too big for our brains. If He wasn't, He would not be worthy of our worship.

Let's face it, mankind has a hard time comprehending the extensive universe God has created. Some astronomers speculate that there are about 100 billion galaxies each with billions of stars. It would take more than 300,000 billion years just to count and name them. God can count them all and even names them (Psalm 147:4). God is a lot smarter than all of us. We cannot begin to understand a limited universe much less its unlimited Creator.

God measures all things. Nothing can measure Him. He is too big to be measured by a ruler. He is too old to be measured by a calendar. Could you imagine making a full-size map of the universe? Where would you put it? Where would you get it? Can you imagine tabulating God's age or His birthday? It would be like looking for the beginning point and ending point of a gold ring.

Benefits of an Eternal God

So, what difference does it make to your life if God is eternal? 1) God's mercy is eternal (Psalms 103:17). He will never grow tired of you in Heaven. 2) God's love is eternal (Jeremiah 21:3; Jer. 31:3; I John 4:16; Eph. 3:18). He will never stop loving you. 3) His power is eternal (Rom. 1:20). He will never run out of strength to keep you and protect you. 4) His knowledge is eternal (Acts 15:18). He will never come to a point where He does not know you or know what is best for you. 5) His goodness is infinite (Mic. 7:18-20). He will never run out of good things for you. 6) His holiness is infinite. (Job 4:17-18). He will always keep everything about you perfectly clean and pure in Heaven.

Because of God's eternal attributes He has prepared things eternal for His saints:

- ▶ Eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11)
- ▶ Eternal blessings (Eph. 1:3)
- ▶ Eternal words (1 Pet. 1:24,25; Mt. 24:35)
- ▶ Eternal Gospel (Rev. 14:6)
- ▶ Eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12; II Tim. 1:9)
- ▶ Eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9)
- ▶ Eternal comfort (2 Th. 2:16)
- ▶ Eternal kingdom (2 Pet. 1:11)
- ▶ Eternal home (2 Cor. 5:1; Ps. 23:6)
- ▶ Eternal Glory (2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:4)
- ▶ Eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4)
- ▶ Eternal book of life (Rev. 17:8)
- ▶ Eternal life (Jn. 5:24; Mk. 10:30; Rom. 6:23)

Just as the eternal God has things prepared for His saints, He also has something eternal prepared for sinners:

- ◆ Eternal sin (Mk. 3:29)
- ◆ Eternal judgment (Heb. 6:2)
- ◆ Eternal chains (Jd. 1:6)
- ◆ Eternal punishment (Mt. 25:46)
- ◆ Eternal fire (Mt. 25:41)
- ◆ Eternal destruction (2 Th. 1:9)

It took time for you to read this lesson. One day you and I will no longer be governed by the tick of the clock and ruled by the passing of time. Our eternal souls will be ushered into eternity. Hopefully, we will find ourselves spending eternity with our eternal Creator and God in Heaven where He *"will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4).

Questions:

1. What is the question "from where did God come?" not a logical inquiry?
2. Does the Bible ever explain where God came from or when He began to exist?
3. In what two ways do man and God differ with regard to time and space?
4. What does it mean that God is infinite? Who else is infinite?
5. What does 2 Peter 3:8 teach us about God's relationship to time? Who created time?

6. What are three names or phrases used to refer to God existing without beginning or end?

7. Which is more reasonable to believe:
 - a) Something is eternal and made everything.
 - b) Nothing is eternal and everything came from nothing.Explain.

8. Why does the existence of hydrogen in the universe prove that the universe is not eternal?

9. Why is God NOT a time bound entity?

10. The fact God is not limited by time or by space and can be anywhere at anytime proves God is...
 - a) Omnipresent
 - b) Omnipotent
 - c) Omniscient
 - d) Fallible

11. God never gets tired or worn-out. Why?

12. Why does God never grow in knowledge or wisdom?

13. Why is the ability to fully grasp the concept of eternity beyond our comprehension?

14. Can you ever live long enough to count the stars of heaven? Can you ever name them one by one?

Application and Discussion:

1. God is eternal. What benefits does this afford you personally?

2. Why should man fear an eternal God? Why shouldn't man fear a god who is not eternal?

God is Changeless

God Is Immutable

Change is taking place all around us. Some of this change is for the better and we greatly benefit. Faster and safer forms of transportation, computers, improved communications, better medical treatments, etc. are all a part of those changes which improve the quality of human life. However, there are several things which have changed for the worse. The world's morals have changed. Pornography, gambling, homosexuality, adultery, etc. have all increased and brought with them higher crime and divorce rates, greed, perversion, and loss of innocence.

The old saying: "The only thing that is constant is change" is apparently true. However, there is One who never changes: GOD. Time changes everything, but it cannot change the eternal God. Consider the unchanging or immutable nature of God.

God's Existence Does Not Change

Many have wondered, "Who made God?" The Bible tells us God had no beginning nor does He have an ending. *"Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end"* (Ps. 102:25-27). Created things have a beginning and an ending, but this is not so concerning their Creator. *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God"* (Ps. 90:2). The difference between His creatures and Him is that they are mutable, whereas God is immutable. He will never cease to be, nor will He ever cease to be what He already is. He does not grow older or old. God does not mature or develop. His powers are not weakened or strengthened. The wisdom of God does not increase nor does He have lapses in memory. God is perfect. He cannot change for the better or for the worse. God and His character are eternal. So when we are tempted to worry about the uncertainties that are inherent in the changing world, it is reassuring to remember that the whole cosmos in which we live was created by a God who is eternal.

God's Character Does Not Change

Unlike the false gods of paganism, who were thought to be fickle and whose capricious anger was thought unpredictable. God is not subject to no mutations. God has neither evolved, grown or improved. As He has declared, *"For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob"* (Mal. 3:6). The character of God today is exactly as it was in Bible times, and as it will be long after this world ceases to be. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning"* (Js. 1:17). Thus, throughout the Old Testament He is referred to as *"the Rock"* (Dt. 32:4). The Great *"I AM THAT I AM"* cannot lie (Ex. 3:14; Tit. 1:2). God's power and glory ever remains undiminished (Is. 46:9-11). Although men lie, are weak and fickle, God is not. His everlasting love (Jer. 31:3) and His everlasting mercy (Ps. 100:5) are immutable.

God's Purpose Does Not Change

"And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent" (1 Sam. 15:29). Man's ways, we know, are pathetically inconstant - but not God's ways. Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God is always reliable! He does not begin any work, and finds He has made

a mistake and must repent. If He were painting a room He would not paint Himself into a corner.

Some may wonder about a few passages which seem to indicate that God does repent (Gen. 6:6; I Sam. 15:11; Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:13; etc.). Not one of these suggests a change in His eternal purpose, nor do they suggest that God was taken by surprise. They are cases of God's reversal of His prior treatment of an individual or group, because the people had changed. Repenting means revising one's judgment and changing one's plan of action (Num. 23:19). The reference in each case is a reversal of God's previous treatment of particular men, consequent upon their reaction to that treatment. When He institutes a change in His dealing with men, He describes His cause of conduct as "repenting". His counsel has not changed (Heb. 6:17). God sent Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh: "*Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed.*" When the people repented of their sins, God "repented" of His decision to destroy them and show mercy instead.

The poem, *There Will Always Be God* by Leonard Murray sum up these thoughts very well.

They cannot shell His temple,
nor dynamite His throne;
They cannot bomb His city,
nor rob Him of His own.
They cannot take Him captive,
nor strike Him deaf and blind,
Nor starve Him to surrender,
nor make Him change His mind.
They cannot cause Him panic,
nor cut off His supplies;
They cannot take His kingdom,
nor hurt Him with their lies.
Though all the world be shattered,
His truth remains the same,
His righteous laws still potent,
and Father still His name.
Though we face war and struggle,
and feel their goad and rod,
We know above the confusion
There always will be God.

A changeless God means terror for the wicked. God hates sin. God has promised to punish sin. Hence He will eternally punish all who continue to live in sin. The immutability of God not only insures us of the execution of His threats against the wicked, but also comforts us with the assurance that He will perform His promises to the righteous.

Although God is changeless, we can change. Our choice to sin has changed our relationship with God (Is. 59:1,2). It is up to us to change our relationship with sin and return to our changeless God. He has not moved. We have. Thus, we are the ones who must move back to Him.

Comforts in a Changeless God

Life is short. We feel it in our bones. We see it in our mirrors. The new quickly wears out. The whole universe is winding down, moving from hot to cold, and energy is being used up. Scientists tell us that in 4.5 million years our own sun will burnout. Perhaps you are not overly worried about the sun, but we must realize that life on this earth changes and is not everlasting. However, in the spiritual realm there are several things which never change and this can give us great comfort. These do not change, because they are based on the fact that our God is changeless.

In an effort to support miraculous healing today many will quote Hebrews 13:8. "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*". "What proves too much, proves nothing" is still a very fine rule. If Hebrews 13:8 demands a repetition of some first century miracles of healing for people of the 20th

century, then why not a repetition of all types of miracles and all the actions of Jesus. Jesus raised the dead. If Jesus is the same today as yesterday than why do they not raise the dead.

The context will prove the real meaning behind this passage. The Hebrew saints were in danger of turning back to Judaism. The principal theme of the letter to them is that Christ and His covenant is better. As the Roman - Jewish conflict drew near, the choice between loyalty to Christ and loyalty to the nation, temple, and priesthood had to be made. Our religion, unlike the Jewish religion under the Law of Moses, should not be affected by the death of a priest or a preacher. *"Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"* (Heb. 7:23,24). Showing the virtue of Christ's supremacy it says, *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"* (v. 25).

No one needs to worry about waking up one day and finding our Savior has burnout and given up. He is not fickle, vacillating, unpredictable, unreliable, ever-changing. He is eternal; He means what He says; He keeps His word; He is able to save and to keep; He is no respecter of persons. Life His Father the Son of God does not change because He also is God.

Comfort in a Changeless Kingdom

Our political system is changing. The nation may fall into the hands of another. Such change brings many fears. The empires of Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome are gone. Kingdoms come and kingdoms fall. Political uprisings and revolutions are resplendent throughout history, and they will continue throughout man's time on earth. However, there is a kingdom which cannot be "shaken" - it is the Kingdom of God. *"Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, but which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear"* (Heb. 12:28). The prophets of old proclaimed its coming (Is. 28:16; Dan. 2:44; Eph. 2:20-22). Since His kingdom's beginning on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem in 30 A.D. it has been the subject of attacks. The Jewish nation sought to trample it out, but their Temple is gone and with it their religion. The Roman Empire sought to destroy it, but Rome is long gone and the Kingdom remains. False doctrines, sin, persecutions, Bible burnings, evolution, atheism and humanism have attacked it, yet, the church stands firm as the pillar and ground of the truth.

Comfort in a Changeless Creed

Men sometimes change their views. All of us sometimes have to recall our words, because they have ceased to express what we think. Sometimes we have to eat our words, because hard facts refute them. God's Word is different. *"Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven. Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever"* (Ps. 119:89,152). God still keeps all His promises, and requirements, and forewarnings that are here addressed to readers of the New Testament. These are not relics of a antiquated age. As Christ said, *"the Scripture cannot be broken"* (Jn. 10:35). Nothing can void God's eternal truth.

It is quite popular to believe that the Word of God is rather antiquated. "After all, how could a unsophisticated, unlearned carpenter give sufficient laws to govern morals of such an advanced world as ours after two thousand years?" Creeds of men change constantly. Women preachers, abortion, homosexuality were all once rejected by denominational leaders and creed books. One year babies who died without being baptized go to Hell, the next year the doctrine changes to allow babies to go to heaven without baptism. The changeless Kingdom law is never amended. The Lord promised, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"* (Matt. 24:35).

Comfort in a Changeless Hope

The body is under constant change. We have our hopes and aspirations in life, but as we age all our hopes, desires, and activities must be altered with age and declining health. Our hope of eternal life is not decreased by age, but according to Paul as our outer man decreases the inner man can grow stronger and healthier. *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing,*

yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

In the song *There Stands a Rock* S.S. Journal contrasts the "ever drifting sand" on which some build their hopes with the immutable God.

There stands a Rock on the shores of time,
That rears to heav'n its head sublime;
That Rock is cleft, and they are blest
Who find within this cleft a rest.
Some build their hopes on the ever drifting sand,
Some on their fame or their treasure or their land,
Mine's on the rock that forever shall stand,
Jesus, the "Rock of Ages."

Let us face the fact that we live in troubled times, due to man's change from a changeless God. Yet there is comfort in the fact that our Savior, the Kingdom, His Word, and our Hope will never change, because God never changes. The proper way to confront life's changes is to live a faithful life to a changeless God.

Questions:

1. T F Everything and everyone changes sooner or later.
2. List some ways in which God never changes.
3. T F The God of the New Testament is more merciful and loving than the God of the Old Testament.
4. What about passages, such as Gen. 6:6; I Sam. 15:11; Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:13, which claim God repents? Explain.
5. What does a changeless God bring terror to the hearts of the impenitent wicked?
6. Does Hebrews 13:8 support the continued use of miracles of God into the twenty-first century? Explain.

7. How is Christ a superior High Priest than the priests of the after the lineage of Aaron?

8. Why is the Kingdom of God changeless compared to the kingdoms of men? How does this bring comfort to the citizens of God's Kingdom?

9. Explain the difference between the creeds of men and the immutable creed (Bible) from God?

10. How does an changeless hope give Christians great comfort?

Application and Discussion:

1. In what ways has your relationship with the changeless God changed you?

2. What changes has man made in doctrines and morals which directly conflict with the changeless nature of God?

God is Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most misunderstood teachings of the Bible. Christians are unceasingly charged with believing in polytheism (worshiping many gods) or at least tritheism (worshiping three gods). Oneness Pentecostals and Muslims alike have a very strict view of monotheism.

Is there one God or can there be one God in three Persons? In the Bible God is triune, not triplex. God is three in the unity of one. In the mind of a strict monotheist this is as impossible as $1+1+1=1$. However, the trinity of God is more like $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. In describing and explaining the trinity the term "Godhead" appears with great frequency. The English "Godhead" appears three times in the KJV: Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9. According W.E. Vine it means "The Divine essence of Godhood, the personality of God."

Understanding the Concept of the Godhead

There Is Only One God...

The Bible contains many passages of scripture in both the Old and New Testaments teaching there is only one God.

- Deut. 6:4 - *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!"*
- 1 Tim. 2:5 - *"There is one God"*
- Is. 44:6 - *"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God.'"*
- Mk. 12:29 - *"Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"*
- 1 Cor. 8:4 - *"Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one."*

Many other passages can be read which teach that there is one God (Dt. 32:39; 2 Sam. 7:22; Ps. 86:10; Is. 37:20; 43:10; 45:5,14,21-22; 46:9; Jn. 5:44; 17:3; Rom. 3:29-30; 16:27; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Th. 1:9; 1 Tim. 1:17; Js. 2:19; 1 Jn. 5:20,21; Jd. 25).

...Consisting of Three Persons

Christians who believe in the Trinity worship One God, Who is manifest in three distinct Persons: God the Father; Jesus the Son; and the Holy Spirit. All three are God, but all three are distinct persons.

Jesus is God *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God"* (John 1:1,2). However, Jesus is not the Father. *"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ"* (1 Jn. 1:3). On several occasions Jesus accepted worship (Matt. 14:33; Jn. 9:38). Only God is to be worshiped (Mt. 4:10). Therefore, Jesus consider Himself to be God. Jesus was 100% God and 100% man at the same time.

The Father is God. *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 1:3). Yet, the Father is not the Holy Spirit. *"When Jesus had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'"* (Mt. 3:16-17).

The Holy Spirit is God. *"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God'"* (Ac. 5:3,4). In contrast, the Holy Spirit is not the Son. *"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever,"* (Jn. 14:16).

All three are God. They are each wholly God and God is One. God is one What and three Whos. Each member of the Godhead is God, not just one-third of God.

How Three Can Be One?

▲ Elohim Is Plural

Monotheism as explained by Islam is simple. The Bible concept of one God in three Persons is difficult and complex.

In the Old Testament there are two words primarily used to refer to God - ELOHIM and JEHOVAH or YAHWEH. The term *elohim* is the plural of El. *Elohim* means the "state of being God." Jehovah is "the eternal, self-existent one." Note how the plural noun for God is used in the passages which follow:

- Deut. 6:4 - *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God (elohim), the Lord is one!"*
- Ps. 86:8 - *"There is none like unto thee among the gods (elohim), O Lord"*
- Ps. 96:4,5 - *"For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods (elohim). For all the gods (elohim) of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens."*
- Ps. 136:1-2 - *"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God (elohim) of gods (elohim)! For His mercy endures forever."*

▲ Plural Pronouns

Plural pronouns are sometimes used of God or when he speaks. God is referred to as "Us" in the creation of man. *"Then God said, 'Let **Us** make man in Our image, according to **Our** likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth' (Gen. 1:26).* This passage could not refer to angels because they are not co-creators. The ability to create belongs to deity, not angels. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ, not the angels, created all things (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2). Later, when man sinned in the Garden of Eden, *"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of **Us**, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'"* (Gen. 3:22). When man sinned against God by building the tower of Babel God said, *"Come, let **Us** go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech"* (Gen. 11:7). Finally, at the commission of the prophet Isaiah, he *"heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for **Us**?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'"* (Is. 6:8).

▲ Plural Beings Referenced

Several passages list the members of the Godhead as distinct individuals within the same passage. This clearly indicates the God consists of a plurality of persons. Again, note the evidence for the Trinity found in the baptism of Jesus. *"When **Jesus** had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly **a voice came from heaven**, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'"* (Mt. 3:16-17). Another such reference can be found in the promise of Jesus sending the Holy Spirit to His apostles. *"But when the **Helper** comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, **the Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the **Father**, He will testify of **Me**"* (Jn. 15:26). When Jesus gave the great commission to His disciples before His ascension He referenced all three persons of the Godhead. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**,"* (Mt. 28:19). In all the epistles of the New Testament at least two Persons of the Trinity are mentioned in the opening greetings (Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1,2; Ga. 1:3; Eph. 1:1-3; Phil. 1:1,2; Col. 1:1; 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1,2; 1 Tim. 1:1,2; 2

Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:1; Phlm. 3; Heb. 1:1,2; Js. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Jn. 2:1; 2 Jn. 3; Jude 2. This is true even of the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:1). When Paul gives his closing remarks in his second letter to the Corinthians he mentions all three Persons of the Godhead. "*The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the communion of the **Holy Spirit** be with you all. Amen*" (2 Cor. 13:14).

▲ **Plural Beings Communicating**

In some passages of scripture one Person of the Godhead is speaking to another.

- **Ps. 110:1** - *The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."*
- **Ps. 2:7** - *"I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ` `You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. (cf. Heb. 1:5)*
- **Ps. 22:22** - *I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the congregation I will praise You. (cf. Heb. 2:12)*

Consider the last passage where one Person is saying "*I will make thy enemies submit*" and the Other is responding, "*I will sing thy praises.*" Furthermore during Jesus' prayer recorded in John 17 He carries on a conversation with the Father.

"One" in Unity

- **The Hebrew Word for "One"**

There are two Hebrew words for "one": *yachid*, which means "absolute mathematical oneness;" and *echad*, meaning a "composite unity" or a "united one." Deuteronomy 6:4 reads "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!*" The Hebrew word for one is "echad" meaning God is a united one, not one in number. In Genesis 1:5 we're told, "*there was evening and there was morning, one (echad) day*" That is, a day is the uniting of an evening plus a morning. In Genesis 2:24 we read that, "*a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one (echad) flesh.*" Although a man and a wife are two distinct persons there are united as one in marriage. Numbers 13:23 describes one (echad) cluster of grapes. In Ezra 3:9 echad is used of people acting in unison. Many musicians can play different instruments and it can still be one (echad) sound (2 Chr. 5:13). All of Judah consisted of many numerous individuals, but they are of one (echad) heart (2 Chr. 30:12). This is how one plus one plus one can equal one.

- **In the Greek**

What is true in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament is paralleled in the Greek language of the New Testament. Jesus said "*I and my father are one*" (Jn. 10:30). The word "one" is from the Greek *heis*. In this verse it is in the neuter gender *hen*. The marginal note in the New American Standard defines it: "a unity, or one essence". Jesus is not saying that He and the Father are the same Person, but they have the same essence.

- **Examples of Plural Oneness**

Analogy can be very helpful in explaining the Trinity. An early missionary to Ireland named Patrick used a shamrock (three leaf clover) to explain the Trinity. Three leaves join to make up the whole. Keep in mind that no analogy of the Trinity is perfect. The Trinity is not like a chain of three links because God cannot be separated and a single link cannot be called a chain. God is not three actors playing one part or one actor playing three parts. All analogies to the Trinity will have their shortcomings. As previously seen the analogy of marriage shows how two can be one, it does not show how three can be one.

The concept of love can help us understand the concept of the Trinity. After all, "*God is love*" (1 Jn. 4:16). Love is triune in that it involves a lover, the loved one, and the spirit of love shared between the lover and the beloved. Love is singular but all three part or persons are essential for love to be realized.

Another apt illustration that has proven helpful to some is the relation between mind, ideas, and expressing it in words. All may have unity but they are not singular. They are plural in number and distinct for each other. Yet, all three work as one to communicate a single thought.

- **Oneness in Attributes**

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal and share in the same attributes. They are Creators (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3; Job 26:13); eternal (Rom. 16:26; Rev. 22:13; Heb. 9:14); holy (Rev. 4:8; 15:4; Ac. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:20); omnipotent (Gen. 17:1; Rev. 1:8; Rom. 15:19; Jer. 32:17; Lk. 1:35); omnipresent (Jer. 23:24; Eph. 1:23; Ps. 139:7-10); and omniscient (Acts 15:18; Jn. 21:17; 1 Cor. 2:10,11; Job 26:13; 33:4). To be God each one must equally possess all these attributes.

- **Oneness in Action**

To be united as one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit must be united in action. These three are one in work (Jn. 4:34; 16:13-15); in creation (Jn. 1:1-3; Eph. 3:9; Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13-14); in word (Jn. 12:49); in name (authority) (Jn. 5:43; Rev. 2:1,7; Heb. 1:1-4); in love (Jn. 14:23; Romans 5:5); in protection (Jn. 10:27-30); in witness (Jn. 8:18); in doctrine (Jn. 6:16; 7:16; 14:26; 16:15); in will (Jn. 6:38; 16:8-13); and in judgment (Jn. 5:22,30; 16:11).

Differing Functions or Roles

The idea of being equal yet functioning in different roles can be hard for some to understand. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all equally God, nonetheless they function together in different roles. Jesus relates as a Son to the Father. This does not make Him less God than the Father. Each person in the Godhead had a role or function that they fulfilled. One God consisting of three persons with diverse roles to fulfill as they function together as one.

- **Creation**

This diversity in role is seen in the Creation. The Father planned the creation (Gen. 1:1-2; Jer. 51:14-15; Ps. 33:9), the Word executed the Father's plan (Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:1-2) and the Holy Spirit completed it (Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; Ps. 104:30; cf. Gen. 2:7). Perhaps, they can be described in their various roles as architect, contractor and carpenter.

- **Incarnation of Christ**

In the incarnation of Christ, the Father sent the Son (John 3:16; 8:42; 12:44-45), Jesus worked the works of Him that sent Him (John 5:30, 36-37; 6:38; 9:4) and the Holy Spirit was sent to Mary for the miraculous conception (Lk. 1:35).

- **Scheme of Redemption**

According to Peter, all three members of the Trinity work to bring us new life and provide us assurance of our salvation. "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied*" (1 Pet. 1:1-2). Redemption of man was planned for from eternity by the Father (Eph. 1:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:9). Christ was the sacrifice (John 4:34; Eph. 1:3-7; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:18-20) and the Holy Spirit was to reveal the scheme of redemption at the right time through the holy apostles and prophets (Jn. 16:8-13; Eph. 3:1-4; 1 Cor. 2:9-10).

- **Submission**

It is true that Jesus submitted to the Father. Does this prove inequality between the two? Is Jesus thus less God than the Father? Differing roles and function naturally require submission in order for each person involved to work together. Islam means "submission". However, in the New Testament idea of submission may be different. After all, all Christians are equal and all Christians do not have the same role, however all must submit one to another (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:22; Heb. 13:7,17).

Summary

The Bible does not teach tritheism or three Gods. It teaches there is one God which consists of three Persons in perfect equality and unity. Although it is a difficult concept to grasp and teach it is essential to correcting the misunderstandings over monotheism that exist between Islam and Christianity.

Questions:

1. What are the mistakes the Muslims make with regard to the Biblical teach about the Trinity or Godhead?
2. List several passages that teach there is only one God.
3. List scriptures that show the following:
Jesus is God _____ Jesus is not the Father _____
The Father is God _____ The Father is not the Holy Spirit _____
The Holy Spirit is God _____ The Holy Spirit is not the Son _____
4. What does the Hebrew word *elohim* means? How does it relate to this study?
5. Name the events were the plural pronoun is used to refer to God.
6. Name the events were all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned.
7. What does the Hebrew word *echad* mean? How does this relate to the study of the Trinity?
8. What does the Greek word *hen* mean in John 10:10?
9. List the analogies of plural oneness given in this lesson and give one of your own or one that you have learned from someone else.
10. What divine attributes do each of the members of the Godhead possess?

11. Explain the role or function of each member of the Godhead in the Scheme of Redemption.

God the Father:

God the Son:

God the Holy Spirit:

12. T F The submission of Jesus to God demonstrates the Son is less God than the Father.

Application and Discussion:

1. How would you go about teaching someone about the godhead or trinity?

2. Do you as a Christian have an intimate loving relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Explain.

God is Our Father

Having a father around when growing up is very important for the happy development of a child. Just ask any young adult who looks back on their childhood and sees all that they had missed because they did not have a dad around like other children. A poem by a young college student named Heather well illustrates this point:

I Wish I Had A Dad
Someone to play catch with,
on sunny afternoons.
someone I can turn to when my day turns blue,
some one to hold me if I come unglued.
someone to dance with on my wedding day,
a dad who will give me away.
someone I look up to,
a dad I can trust.
A dad my children will call grandpa.
Life is unfair sometimes,
I wish I had a dad who would just be there
and never leave.

Regardless of the make up of your physical family, all young men and women can have God as their Father. Perhaps no other metaphor describes God better in His relationship to the creatures created in His image than that of "father." The children of Israel were to view God as their Father. "...for I am a Father to Israel" (Jer. 31:9). However it was not until Christ came that men came to know God as Father in an intimate way. Jesus said, "*Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will*" (Mark 14:36). The Hebrew word for "father" is *ab*. Ab-raham is father of a multitude. "Abba," according to several scholars, is one of a child's first words for its daddy.

All metaphors breakdown at some point. "Father" is not a perfect description of God. There is no one metaphor which can completely describe God to man. Since no earthly father is perfect using them as a point of comparison gives us an imperfect picture of God, the Father. God always desires the best for His children. He will always be able to discern what is best for His children. Unlike biological fathers, God will always have the power to effect what is best for them. Jesus said, "*or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*" (Matt. 7:9-11).

The Fatherhood of God

When discussing the Fatherhood of God it is imperative to keep in mind that there are three types of relationships involved. First, God is the Father of all mankind in the sense that He is their progenitor or creator. "*For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'*" *"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising"* (Acts 17:28,29). In relationship to the rest of the Godhead, God is Father to His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. "*While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice*

came out of the cloud, saying, *'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'*"(Matt. 17:5). Finally, God is the Father of those who have been born again of water into His family, those who have obeyed the Gospel to be saved, and added to the household of God *"For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"* (Mt. 12:50). *"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.* (Mt. 23:9; cf. Jn. 1:12; 3:3). It is the Father/Child relationship which God has with His redeemed which is the focus of this lesson.

Establishing the Father/Child Relationship

Why do you need God as your Father? Just as all men and women need to have a biological father to have physical life, all sinners need to have God as their Father in order to have spiritual life and life eternal. Inasmuch as *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23) and *"the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23a) everyone of us is in need of *"the gift of God"* which *"is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23b).

In order for God to become our Father, He had to send His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). Paul wrote, *"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 3:24). The problem is, true justice demands that all crimes or sins are punished and none go unpunished. To punish us for our sins means death. To redeem us from paying the penalty for all our sins, Christ paid the redemption price by dying on the cross for our sins. Justice has been satisfied in that the wages of sin have been paid by someone who never sinned - the Son of God. Now we can be justified - *just if I'd never sinned.* *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). This new relationship with God begins when one is buried with Christ in baptism and arises to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).

Knowing God as a Father

Once one becomes a member of the household or family of God (1 Tim. 3:15) it is very important for him to grow in his relationship as a child of God. This requires the children of God to understand and truly know God as their Father. This begins by not only thinking of God as our Father but to think of our selves as His children. Like any relationship, this one is a two-way street. Not only is God your Father, but you are His child. *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 Jn. 3:1,2; cf. Rom. 8:16).

As all father's on earth differ in character, God's character is always the same and it is completely good all the time in relationship to His children. While many have grown up having never known love or felt loved by their father, God loves us and has demonstrated that love through the sending of His Son *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* (1 Jn. 4:10).

Fathers are very busy people. Sometimes a child will have to call out *"Look, Daddy, look. Look, Daddy, look"* just to get his attention. Dads cannot focus on their children every minute they are at home. This is not true of our Heavenly Father for He is ever present, all-knowing, and is able to do anything. *"Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You"* (Ps. 139:16-18a). God is an attentive Father and is always available to listen to the prayers and cares of His faithful children. *"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name"* (Mt. 6:9). *"Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you"* (1 Pet. 5:7).

Many fathers are unforgiving. They hold grudges against their children for failing to be the person they wanted them to be. A father and son become estranged because the son chooses to be an art

teacher to elementary children instead of becoming a corporate lawyer like his dad. Many fathers will put unconscionable conditions upon their children before they will show them forgiveness. God's forgiveness is "free" to us because Jesus has paid the debt. God is willing to forgive. He only requires that Christians repent of their sins, confess their sins, (1 Jn. 1:8-10), pray to Him with a forgiving heart *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses"*(Mk. 11:25,26).

Fathers should provide for and protect their children. Often fathers will fail in this regard and sometimes there is nothing they can do about it because of circumstances beyond their control. As long as we seek God and His Kingdom first, we are assured that all things necessary will be provided. *"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matt. 6:31-33). Furthermore, nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35f). He has promised *"no weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me," says the Lord*" (Is. 54:17). Paul had this hope *"and the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!"* (2 Tim. 4:18).

God intends for children to be trained and disciplined by their fathers (Eph. 6:4). Many fathers are lazy, others are ignorant, some are foolish. God has promised *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye"* (Ps. 32:8). He also loves us enough to use His rod of correction when needed. *"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives"* (Heb. 12:6).

To truly know God as one's Father is to understand His compassion. Compassion means "to feel with." God feels for the pain and suffering of His Children. When the children of Israel were suffering under the yoke of Egyptian bondage God took pity on them. *"Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them"* (Ex. 2:23,24). God's compassion and mercy are based on the condition of our reverence for Him. *"As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him"* (Ps. 103:13).

Man's Rejection of God the Father

Today, modern feminist theology is calling into question the exclusive use of "Father" for God and not "Mother." *The World Mission Society Church of God* explains that "God the Mother is the core of our faith and the figure that guides us. A human, by nature, is susceptible to committing a sin. God the Mother, who understands human vulnerability, steers us in the right direction just as our mother takes care of children. God the Mother stands by and prays for us whenever we face hardships." During a national meeting of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community churches the bylaws were changed to refer to God as either male or female. The denomination is predominately homosexual. Some Bible translations are now using gender-neutral pronouns for God and others feminine pronouns for God where masculine pronouns would be a more befitting translation. Those who hold to such feminist views of God use the syllogism which follows:

First Premise: God is a spirit, not flesh and blood (Jn. 4:23,24)

Second Premise: Gender is a human and animal attribute.

Conclusion: Therefore a specific gender cannot be assigned to God.

The fact that God is sometimes alluded to as a mother by use of feminine metaphors as some arguing that referencing Him as Mother would give believers a fuller understanding of His multifaceted

nature and attributes (Is. 66:12–13; Hos. 11:1–4). Even Jesus describes Himself as a mother hen in reference to His compassion on Jerusalem. Other quote Psalm 48:3 as proof: “God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge.” The “she” in the context is referring to “Mount Zion” in verse two, not God. Yet, no where in Scripture is God the Father or God the Son every directly called Mother.

Another common attack on God the Father and our relationship to Him as His children, is the use of Father to describe a spiritual relationship with human religious leaders. Today, millions will refer to priests as Father and the Pope (coming from papa in the Latin, a child’s word for father) is the often titled “Holy Father,” “Most Holy Father,” and “Most Blessed Father.”

Jesus warned the Pharisees, *“do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven”* (Matt. 23:9). Jesus made reference to men having physical fathers (Matt. 10:21), so He is not opposed to calling a man “father” in a biological sense. By calling any man on earth our father is to give to a mere mortal, immoral man honor which is only due to God.

God wants all men and women to become His children. Jesus has died and has gone to prepare for us a place in His Father’s house (Jn. 14:1-6). All you need to do is to be born again into the family of God. Or, if you are a prodigal son, return home immediately. The Father is waiting to welcome you home with joy and forgiveness.

Questions:

1. What is the Hebrew word for Father? What does Abraham mean?
2. How was God the Father of Israel?
3. Why is Father not a perfect metaphor for God?
4. List the three relationships in which God is the Father?
5. At what point does the sinner become a child of God the Father?
6. Why was it essential for Jesus to come and die for us to become children of God?
7. How does the omnipresence of God make Him the best Father?

8. What prerequisites does God the Father require of sinful children before they can be reconciled?
9. To what extent is God the Father able to protect His children?
10. T F God's demonstration of compassion for His children is without conditions.
11. What arguments are some feminist theologians using for calling God "mother" and/or using gender/neutral pronouns? How would you refute these arguments?
12. Why is it wrong to call priests or the pope "Father"?

Application and Discussion:

1. How does God discipline His children today? Have you ever experienced the chastisement of God? If so, how?
2. How can you use the fact of God being a great spiritual Father to motivate prodigal sons to return or alien sinners to obey the Gospel?

God is Jealous

Did you hear about the jealous general that retired and started working for a typewriter company, but then quit because the typewriters had more ribbons than he had? Or the husband who was so jealous that when his wife bought him new underwear, he hired a private investigator to find the man whose initials are BVD? Jealousy can be a bad character trait. In fact, it is listed as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19f). Yet, the fact is, *“the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”* (Ex. 34:14). How can God be jealous? *“God is love”* (1 Jn. 4:8) and *“love is not jealous”* (1 Cor. 13:4 NAS). Can God be sour and selfishly possessive?

The truth is, jealousy is not always a negative character trait. It can be a divine virtue. The word “jealous” is specifically used at least twenty times in Scripture to describe the character of God. This is not to say that God in the Old Testament is jealous, but is a better God in the New Testament in that He is more loving. Since God does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), He has always been jealous. Again, please note that “Jealous” is one of God’s names.

What Does it Mean?

The Hebrew word for “jealousy” means “redness of the face that accompanies strong emotion” (Feinberg, 1942, p. 429). The Old Testament word “jealous” means to become intensely red. Just as we become red in the face when angered or embarrassed or passionate about something or someone, so our God has emotions as well. The term can be associated with fire. “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24).

The Greek word *zeloo* is often translated as “affect,” “covet,” “desire,” “envy,” “jealous,” or “zealous.” The term “jealous” is akin to the noble word “zealous.” Like the Hebrew word, the Greek term also comes from the root meaning “heat.” Jealous with a hot desire or in taking a warm interest in something or someone.

Jealousy is indeed a sin when it is misdirected without knowledge or with the wrong desires or emotions. In a positive way one can be jealous with a vigilant guarding of a possession. God is jealous of the worship and service which is due to Him alone, because He is God and there is none other. His jealousy is not selfishness but a natural expression of His holiness. His jealousy is never produced out of insecurity, covetousness or an over-inflated ego. Instead, it is totally consistent with His love and holiness.

Whereas jealousy can be a flawed emotion in mankind, it is not that way with God. In Othello, Shakespeare in reference to jealousy said, “It is the green-eyed monster.” Jealous can be an ugly word. When it results in resentment and hostility toward another because they are enjoying a blessing one wants for themselves. Jacob favored Joseph and *“his brothers were jealous of him”* (Genesis 37:11). This resulted in their sins against their younger brother by selling him into slavery and deceiving their father causing him to think his son was dead.

Often the terms “jealousy” and “envy” are used interchangeably. Yet there is a difference between the two. Whereas jealousy is sometimes good, envy is always bad. Jealousy may cause one to feel bad and even desire the benefits of another. Envy goes even further in that the envious want the other person to lose the blessing over which they are envious. Cain’s jealousy grew until he rose up and murdered his brother, Abel (Gen. 4). King Saul’s jealousy over David’s fame caused him to become envious enough to attempt to kill young David.

So, why is jealousy in man sometimes sinful, but jealousy of God is a Divine attribute? Jealous, like the emotion anger, is morally neutral. It is the motive and object of the emotion which makes the difference. Man is jealous out of pride and lust. Whereas God is jealous for that which is His exclusively.

Perhaps comparing it to the husband/wife relationship will make the issue clearer. A husband can be jealous with regard to his relationship with his wife in a wrong way or in a right way. For example, if he feels resentment or anger merely because he sees her talking to another man, that would be self-centered possessiveness and unreasonable domination and therefore, sinful jealousy. On the other hand, if a man sees some other man actually trying to alienate his wife's affections from him and seduce her, then he has reason to be righteously jealous. God gave her to be his wife. Her body is to him just as his body is hers. As her husband, he has the exclusive right to enjoy her fully, and for someone else to assume that right would be a violation of God's holy standards. If a husband was not jealous over the other man's amorous advances toward his wife, he would not be a loving or holy husband. Such a husband "who felt no jealousy at the intrusion of a lover or an adulterer into their home would surely be lacking in moral perception; for the exclusiveness of marriage is the essence of marriage" (Tasker, R.V.G. (1967), *The Epistle of James* (London: Tyndale Press) p. 106). In a marriage, a wife has the right to expect faithfulness by her husband. She would be right to be jealous if her husband was sharing his body with another woman because their marriage covenant made their relationship exclusive of all others. If a husband sees another man flirting with his wife, he is right to be jealous, for only he has the right to flirt with his wife. This type of jealousy is not sinful. Rather, it is entirely appropriate.

In the same way, God is jealous for His wife. He will not accept the idea that He has to share our passion and affection with anyone or anything else. Is God un-reasonably jealous, like an insecure husband or wife? NO! Israel was warned against playing the harlot with other gods, "*lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods*" (Ex. 34:15,16). They prostitute themselves by "*playing the harlot*" (Jeremiah 3:6-10). God called Israel's idolatrous practice "adultery," and for this reason He had "*put her away and given her a certificate of divorce*" (3:8). The man or woman who worships other gods is committing spiritual adultery against God. Surely, God has a right to be jealous.

God Manifests His Jealousy

Hosea was a prophet who was instructed by God to marry the prostitute Gomer, who gave birth to three children. It was not clear if the last two were Hosea's children or not. Why would God have one of his prophets marry a known harlot? So that God could use that marriage to demonstrate His own love in taking Israel to be His own special people even though they had time and again played the spiritual harlot by worshiping false gods. Hosea gave Gomer his unmerited love. He offered her a home in spite of the fact that she was shameful and without dignity. As a loving husband he gave her the experience of a genuine relationship with a man and the security of a home. Yet, Gomer ran back to the arms of her unloving "lovers." Instead of divorcing her Homer humbled himself to go to her. He bought her back. He dared to walk into the mess of her life and buy back what already rightfully belonged to him.

This is what God had done for Israel when the nation returned to its spiritual adultery by practicing idolatry. God in jealousy still extended mercy. "*I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy*" (Hosea 2:19). No man with any moral fiber wants to share his wife with another man. Neither does God wish to share His people with any rival idols of the heart. Today, He justly expects exclusive devotion from all Christians.

God Manifests His Jealousy...

▶ With His Wrath

According to the Law of Moses anyone proven to be guilty of adultery was to be stoned to death. (Thanks be to God that is not true today or we would be running out of stones). God's prophets accused Israel of committing spiritual adultery, because she had prostituted herself with idol worship. God had caught unfaithful Israel with its false gods or lovers many times in the history of their relationship. How is God to react to such unholy behavior? How would a husband react to his wife cheating on him? The

Proverbs tell us the husband's anger would be so strong that nothing could stop it (Proverbs 6:29-35). God can be jealous and merciful and loving toward this sinful people. However, when God's wrath is provoked He punishes with zeal or fire.

Nahum 1:2 - *God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies;*
Zephaniah 3:8 - *"Therefore wait for Me," says the Lord, "Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, All my fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.*
Ps 79:5 - *How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?*
Psalm 78:58-59 - *For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images. When God heard this, He was furious, And greatly abhorred Israel,*

This is not just the God of the Old Testament and His "unloving" reaction. When dealing with the issue of idolatry at Corinth Paul wrote, *"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?"* (1 Cor. 10:22).

► **For His Name**

While Moses was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God, his brother Aaron was down below breaking the Ten Commandments with the people. He made the golden image of a calf and the people gave worship to it instead of to the one and only God who had just delivered them from Egypt. Aaron even introduced the calf as *"This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"* (Ex 32:8). Later, God warned Israel, *"Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God)"* (Ex. 34:12-14). God's name is the epitome of who and what He is, and He says His name is Jealous. Jealousy is not just a momentary emotion with God. It is the nature of His person. He cannot be other than jealous any more than He can be anything other than love or holy.

► **For His Glory**

It was divine jealousy which moved the Lord to bring all his plagues on Egypt. Careful reading will show you that those wonders were all aimed at the gods of Egypt. God said, *"against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord"* (Ex. 12:12). His glory will not be given to man-made idols. *"I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images"* (Is. 42:8). For any Christian to give up the throne of their heart to be occupied by anyone or anything other than God is to insult His dignity and rob Him of the glory due to Him alone. When Nebuchadnezzar boastfully cried out, *"Behold this great Babylon which I have built!"* he was punished by a jealous God until he praised God who alone is the Sovereign ruler in the affairs of mankind.

► **For His Worship**

As part of the Ten Commandments God explains why idol worship cannot be tolerated. *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor 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 fourth generations of those who hate Me"* (Ex. 20:4,5). Idol worship is in fact an insult to God the Creator who can make man but man cannot make an idol which can do anything. As the Psalmist wrote, *"Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat"* (Ps. 115:4-7). Man made idols cannot even come close to be a rival to the real God. It would be like a husband finding out that his wife had left him to run off

with another man. And the other man turns out to be a mannequin. After all God had done for His people *"they forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs"* (Judges 3:7b).

▶ **For His Sovereignty**

It was often the case that Israel did not leave Jehovah worship entirely. God's children would sometimes mix true worship with idol worship or worship God while later worshiping idols on the side. Such half-commitment was not good enough for God, who demanded all or nothing at all. He alone is God and ruler of the universe. Elijah told the Israelites to make up their mind who they were going to serve. After he defeated the prophets of Baal in a contest *"all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!'"* (1 Kings 18:39). Christ told the church at Laodicea *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth"* (Rev. 3:16).

▶ **For His People**

After the Babylonian captivity God promised that He would *"bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name"* (Ezek. 39:25). Like a bird that watches over her eggs and young with jealousy, preventing other birds from entering her nest, so God's jealousy is the perfect example of fatherly love for His children, As a husband is jealous of his honor, so is the Lord Jesus much concerned for the purity of His Church (Eph. 5:22f). Christ has a Bride. He has done so much for Her to cleanse Her and redeem Her. He is very jealous over His Bride and will not desire Her to be called by another man's name or works. It is the Bride of Christ not the Bride of Luther or the Bride of the Mormons, etc.

Our God is jealous for His name and His people. God's jealousy drove Him to send His Son to the cross. His loving jealousy should drive us to our knees in worship.

Questions:

1. T F Jealousy is always portrayed as a negative character trait in the Bible.
2. Define the Hebrew word for "jealousy".
3. When and how is jealousy sinful?
4. Why were Joseph's brother jealous of him? What came of this jealousy?
5. What is the difference between sinful "jealousy" and "envy"?
6. How can God's jealousy for His people be compared to the jealous emotions a spouse should have for each other?

7. How was Hosea's relationship with Gomer comparable to God's relationship with Israel?

8. Matching: How God Manifests His Jealousy

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----|---|
| _____ With His Wrath | a. | "served the Baals and Asherahs" |
| _____ For His Name | b. | Bringing Israel back from captivity |
| _____ For His Glory | c. | Shown in contest between Elijah and prophets of Baal |
| _____ For His Worship | d. | God is provoked to punish |
| _____ For His Sovereignty | e. | Aaron's claim golden calf brought them out of Egypt |
| _____ For His People | f. | Motivated God to send the plagues against all the gods of Egypt |

Application and Discussion:

1. What sort of things might you have done in our life that could provoke the jealous wrath of God?

2. God is jealous for His people are you jealous for your God? How?

God is All-Knowing

Following a great storm at sea, the naked lifeless body of a small child was found on a deserted beach. There was nothing to indicate the identity of the child and none came to identify or claim the body, so the tiny mangled form was tenderly prepared for burial and mourned by none. Who was this child? What was its name? On the grave marker a touching epitaph read: "God knows."

It has been said that no one likes a know-it-all. Just think if you knew a know-it-all, someone who did not simply claim to know everything, but actually did. You would want to have them on your team, help you with your homework, and have as a best friend. God is such a know-it-all. God is the Great Know-It-All.

Extent of God's Omniscience

God's omniscience (all-knowing) extends throughout the entire known and even unknown universe. He is also perfectly cognizant of every event. "*Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite*" (Ps. 147:5). Were it in anyway possible for something to occur apart from either the direct means or sanction of God, God would not be seen as omniscient. God is all-knowing, unlike Zeus and the pagan gods who were often tricked by cunning men and women.

How would you like to have ESP, that is, extra sensory perception? Such a person would have the ability to know the thoughts in the minds of their fellow man. Men cannot read minds (1 Cor. 2:10f). God can read our minds. "*For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things*" (1 Jn. 3:20). Plutarch said, "Man may not see thee do an impious deed; but God thy very inmost thoughts can read". God knows every word of every language in every man and woman and child in every place at every minute of every day.

Examples of God's Omniscience

Both the Old and New Testaments are resplendent with examples of God's all encompassing knowledge. When Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit not even the trees of the garden were able to hide them from the eyes of God. Although God already knew why they were hiding and why they knew they were naked, He asked anyway (Gen. 3:6-1). No human eye perceived Cain murdering his brother, but the Creator of all life witnessed his wrongdoing (Gen. 4:10). Achan stole gold and carefully hid it in the earth, but God brought his dark deed to light (Josh. 7:19-21). Man can deceive man, so he thinks he can deceive God. Ananias and Sapphira found out the hard way that you can fool some of the people some of the time and may be you can fool of the people your whole life long, but you can never even once fool God (Acts 5:1-10).

Concerning Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream Daniel said of God, "*He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him*" (Dan. 2:22). The perfect knowledge of God is exemplified and illustrated in every prophecy recorded in His Word both throughout the Old Testament and the life and death of Christ. God foresaw and oversaw the fulfillment of every prophecy of the church or kingdom. He will bring to fruition all the prophetic announcements of the end of time. Such prophecies could only have been given by One who knew the end from the beginning. To think of God, who before the world was formed already knew the purpose and duration of the earth and man (Eph. 3:10) should be overwhelming to mortal man.

Comfort of God's Omniscience

Have you ever observed an ant farm? The ants are normally not seen by man in their natural environment. Viewing through a clear piece of plastic children are able to observe and know all that

goes on in the ant community. All man's thoughts and deed are like that of the ant farm before an all-seeing God.

This might give some a feeling of being naked as one's very soul is exposed before God. However, David seems to view it differently for he writes in verse 6, "*such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high*" (Ps. 139:1-6). God cares for every aspect of our being. Jesus said, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows*" (Mt. 10:29-31). God has the hairs of the head numbered and a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the knowledge of God. He is not impressed with a bunch of trivia. God knows and He cares.

Perhaps, the most comforting aspect of God's omniscience is His knowledge on how to save us (2 Pet. 2:9). His word is perfect knowledge and guidance. School text books can be wrong. God's book is never wrong or lacking. Recently, some editions of a High School history book were discarded, because they had North Korea winning the Korean conflict of the early 1950's and also stated that Napoleon won at Waterloo.

With great confidence we can know that God has told us all we need to know to be saved. What we have not been told are one of the secret things belonging to God (Deut 29:29). We must strive to know the scriptures and not become wise beyond that which is written (Mt. 11:27), but obey what He has written to us.

God Does Not Know

The word "know" has several different meanings. According to Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language "*to perceive or understand as fact or truth; 2. To have established or fixed in the mind or memory; 3. To be cognizant or aware of; be acquainted with as by sight, experience, or report. 4. To understand from experience or attainment 5. To be able to distinguish, as one from another. ...7. to have knowledge, or clear and certain perception, as of fact or truth. 8. To be cognizant or aware, as of some fact, circumstance, or occurrence; have information, as about something.*" (P. 792). In various senses of this word, there are certain things the all-knowing God does not "know".

✘ God Does Not Know Sin

God is holy and therefore is completely separated from sin. Certainly God knows what sin is, but He does not know it experientially, that is, knowledge gained through personal experience, because He has never sinned. He is so Holy that He cannot even be tempted to sin. James tell us, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone*" (Js. 1:13).

✘ God Does Not Know Who Will Be Saved

Some will argue: "If God knows everything absolutely and that before the event, then everything must happen as He knew it would, or else He did not know" or "If the omniscience of God caused Him to know that Adam would eat of that tree, Adam was in a difficult position. If he ate he violated the command of God; if he did not eat he violated the omniscience of God. Man is only functioning as God knew he would. Man may think himself a free agent, but in truth he is only going through the motions. Man will become what God knew he would. All destiny is already fixed. If God knows that you will be lost, you cannot be saved."

Thus, John Calvin came up with his concept of God. Despite what else is found in the Scriptures he had arrived at his conclusion by what was logical to him. Calvin perceived God in His omniscience to know all things: past, present, and future. This led logically to his doctrines which involve predestination. It means that God has "freely and unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass" (Westminster Confession of Faith, III). Without freewill can a man really every be obedient or disobedient to God. God wants our loving obedience. Is love which is predetermined a love which really chooses. In the beginning God created mankind with the ability to chose to obey or disobey. Either God

is in control of man's actions or man is free to control his own destiny.

The foresight of God is flawless, however this does not mean the foreknowledge of God is the perfect controlling force behind every man's thoughts, word, and deeds. God can marvel at the actions, faith or faithlessness of men (Mt. 8:10; Mk. 6:6). Events in history do not happen merely because God has knowledge. Astronomers can predict an eclipse. Such knowledge does not mean they caused the event. Just as God is all-powerful and is not responsible for every action He is not responsible for all the deeds, thoughts, and words of men even though He is all-knowing. God is everywhere, but there are places where God is not present (Gen. 4:16; 2 Kings. 13:23; 24:23; Jer. 23:39). Despite His omniscience there are things he does not know or others He will not hear (Jer. 15:1; Ps. 34:15,16; Is. 1:15).

The Bible gives many examples of God's self-limitations. Before the flood, God repented that He made man (Gen. 6:5-7). Knowing man's wickedness does not place the cause upon God's foreknowledge. When Abraham was about to slay Isaac, God stopped him and said, *"Now I know,"* (Gen. 22:12). Did God know therefore? The image you get from the scriptures is that God did not know and this was a test that He might know. God also told Israel, after the forty years in the wilderness, that this was a period to prove them, to know what was in their heart (Deut. 8:2). God said He did this to prove them, to know (Ex. 32:14; Jud. 3:4; I Sam. 15:35; Jer. 19:5; 32:35).

✘ **God Does Not Know Sinners**

Jesus warned, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 'Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 'And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* (Mt. 7:21-23). Does God know you? If you are not a Christian, God does not know you and He will not know you in the judgment day. *"Verily I say unto you, I know you not"* (Mt. 25:1-13). He will not say to these that He never knew them. In order for Christ to know even those who are God's children they must be faithful to the Lord!

We are studying this attribute of God because it is important to know God. It is equally important to consider: Does God really know you? If we do not know God we are in danger of judgment. *"and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (2 Th. 1:7,8). If God does not know us, we are in danger of judgment. *"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Mt. 7:23).

Questions:

1. What does it mean that God is "omniscient"?
2. How is our omniscience God unlike the pagan gods?
3. T F Some men or women are able to read the minds of others.
4. Match the deed with the doer

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| _____ Adam and Eve | a. | lie about what they gave to God |
| _____ Cain | b. | killed brother |
| _____ Achan | c. | dreamed of great kingdoms |
| _____ Anaias and Sapphira | d. | ate forbidden fruit |
| _____ Nebuchadnezzar | e. | stole forbidden spoils |

5. Why does God know so much about us? What is His motive(s)?
6. What comfort does God's great knowledge give us concerning His Word, the Bible?
7. T F God knows about sin, but He does not know sin in the since He has experienced sin by having committed sin.
8. How does John Calvin use the omniscience of God to promote his doctrine known as "Calvinism"?
9. T F The foreknowledge of God is the perfect controlling force behind every man's thoughts, word, and deeds.
10. Why did God command Abraham offer up his son as a sacrifice?
11. How does God not know sinners in contrast to knowing those who are faithful?

Application and Discussion:

1. List what all God knows about you personally. How can this motivate you to be faithful?
2. How can you use this trait of God in attempts to teach others the Gospel or motivate unfaithful saints to repent?

God is Able

A young boy offered up the following prayer in his Sunday Bible class: "God bless our mothers and our fathers and our teachers and our brothers and our sisters - and please take care of Yourself, God; if anything happens to You, we're sunk!"

Nothing can happen to God, He is not only eternal but omnipotent or all-powerful. Stephen Charnock wrote, "The power of God is the ability and strength whereby He can being to pass whatsoever He pleases." There is nothing our God is not able to do. He possesses the strength, power or effective might to accomplish anything.

God's power is not derived from some outside source. It is an inherent part of His being. He did not acquire strength from anyone or anything. He does not have to eat to maintain his strength or work out at a gym to obtain great strength. "God's power is like Himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the Omnipotent One. He sits on no buttressed throne and leans on no assisting arm. His court is not maintained by His courtiers, not does it borrow its splendor from His creatures. he is Himself the great central source and Originator of all power" (C. H. Spurgeon via *The Attributes of God*, A.W. Pink, 51,52).

One of the most common words used in the Hebrew in reference to deity is "el." It is from a primitive Semitic name meaning "to be strong". The term is commonly found in the poetical books of Psalms and Job. It was El who was able or powerful enough to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt. "*For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe*" (Deut. 10:17). Jesus is prophesied to be "*Mighty God*" in Isaiah 9:6. The term "El" is often used in combination of other terms to describe the nature of God, such as, El Shaddai (Lord God Almighty) or El Elyon (The Most High God). El is found in ancient compound proper names as El-isha, El-izabath, Isra-el, Beth-el, Dani-el.

Another common description and name of God is "Almighty." It is used 48 times in the Old and 9 times in the New Testaments. The word "almighty" means holding sway over all things or ruling everything. It is first used when God appeared to a ninety-nine year old Abram, "*I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless*" (Gen. 17:1).

The Extent of God's Omnipotence

Nothing is too hard for God. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "*Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You*" (Jer. 32:17). The attribute seems self-contradictory to many skeptics who attack the nature of God. Some promote the argument but asking, "Could God created a rock so big and heavy that even He could not lift or move it?" If God cannot create such a rock He is not almighty. If He can create it but cannot move such a rock God would not be omnipotent. Someone could counter this argument with the idea of God creating a bulldozer big enough to do the job. There is a big difference between being able to do something and being willing to do it.

After Jesus dealt with the Rich Young Ruler Jesus claim that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. His disciples recognized this was an impossibility. If a morally upright and wealthy man cannot be saved such as this one, then His disciples wondered who could ever make it to heaven. "*But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'*" (Matt. 19:26). In truth salvation of one's soul cannot be obtained with money or by means of riches. Only by God's grace can one be saved.

God's power is everlasting. "*Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength*" (Is. 26:4). God does not wear-out or get tired. He power is like the Energizer Bunny, He can

just keep going and going.

The power of God is eternal and can be seen by any man who looks with his eyes open and free from prejudice. Paul wrote to the Romans, *“for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse”* (Rom. 1:20).

The Bible is resplendent with descriptions of concerning the greatness of God's power. This great strength of God is matchless. God asked Job, *“Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?”* (Job 40:9). Of God, Job said, *“Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?”* (Job. 26:14). Nebuchadnezzar learned that God's power can never be restrained, *“all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”* (Dan. 4:35). Furthermore, the power of God is independent of any controlling rule or authority. Paul asked, *“does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”* (Rom. 9:21).

Examples of the Omnipotence of God

From the very beginning of the Bible the great power of God is proclaimed. *“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. ... Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.’ ... Then God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’; and it was so”* (Gen. 1:3,6,9). Before man can work he must have both tools and materials, but God began with nothing. His word alone made out of nothing all things. God's power is found in his very words and through His voice is His authority demonstrated (Ps. 33:9; 29:3,5; 68:33). Our words may fall on deaf ears. When God speaks all creation will obey His irresistible Will (Ps. 18:13-15). Theistic evolution assumes that God set the evolutionary process in motion. Yet, it takes just as much faith to believe in the six days of creation. The late eighteenth century Irish-English orator and statesman Edmund Burke said, to be struck with His power, it is only necessary to open our eyes.” Look at creation and see the power of the Creator.

Once the Creation came to be by the powerful words of God, it must be sustained by the same power. Of God's Son it is said, *“who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”* (Heb. 1:3). Creation must have a Creator and a Sustainer. God asked Job, *“Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow up without water?”* (Job. 8:11). God did not create the world and then abandon it. He is not dead. If God died, the source of life, no life could be sustained. All would die. Atheists deny the life of Almighty God while living by the power of God.

According to some religions good and its power is balanced by evil. Both good and evil are said to co-exist as if the opposite sides of the same coin. Of His creation God said it was all *“very good”* (Gen. 1:31). He did not create evil. Even the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good. It allowed man and woman to have a choice to serve God. The serpent in the Garden of Eden tempted Eve, but he demonstrated no power over her. He did not make her take the fruit. He did not hold her down and force her to eat of the tree. God punished the Devil and prophesied his demise. Later, Satan approached God for permission to tempt Job. He could not have hurt a single flea on a hair of one of Job's oldest camels without God allowing him. Satan even tempted Jesus but could not overpower the Son of God. Jesus resisted the Devil with the powerful Word of God. Christians are told to *“resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). This is not due to our strength and power, but due to our relationship with the all-powerful God. If we submit to Him and draw near to Him we will be able to resist the Devil. God further helps saints by not allowing any temptations to be beyond what we are able to handle (1 Cor. 10:13).

Part of God's plan to save man involved the prophesying God's ability to reverse the consequences of sin through the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15). God's covenant with Abraham involved a son. This son would be born of his wife Sarah who was barren. Sarah laughed when the Lord promised

she would have a child. The Lord said, *"is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son"* (Gen. 18:14).

As the plan of salvation came to fruition Jesus came and said to the storm, *"Peace, be still!"* (Mark 4:39). To the lame he commanded *"take up your bed and walk"* (John 5:8). To the leper he said, *"be cleansed"* (Matt. 8:3). He demanded of the spirits of the demon-possessed, *"Be quiet... Come out of the man"* (Luke 4:35). He cried out to His friend who had been dead for four days, *"Lazarus, come forth"* (John 11:43). At His word the stormy wind and angry waves were stilled, the lame rose up and immediately began to walk, the lepers skin become as pure as the day they were born, even legions of demons obeyed, and the dead came back to life. The power of God is seen in the miracles of His Son.

The miracles were not just a show of power, they were done as evidence that Jesus' was the Son of God and His teach was the Good News from God. Of this Gospel Paul wrote, *"for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16). The term "power" in this verse is from the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get dynamite. The Gospel is so powerful it is God's convincing power. By hearing it faith in Christ is produced in the hearts of men (Rom. 10:17). Even those who had cried out to Pilate concerning the fate of Jesus, *"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"* were cut to the heart at the preaching of the first Gospel sermon by Peter (Acts 2:37). Saul of Tarsus who breathed out *"threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord"* (Acts 9:1) became an example to all that God is able to show mercy through the power of the Gospel (1 Tim. 1:15,16).

In the end all will not be saved despite the power of the Gospel and the miraculous powers which demonstrated that Jesus was truly the Son of God. In the days of Noah God sent forth a flood to destroy every breathing creature of the land and air not found on the Ark. His powerful wrath was seen in the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain for their great wickedness. God is powerful enough to send all of His enemies including the Devil, His angels, and all those deceived by Him to everlasting Hell. No man can do such. Jesus said, *"and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt. 10:28). Truly, *"it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Heb. 10:31).

Some Things God Cannot Do

The power of God has its limits not because He is not all-powerful, but because of the greatness of His other attributes. Therefore, there are several things which are impossible for God to do. God is so Holy, He not only does not tempt men to sin, He Himself cannot sin. *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone"* (James 1:13). Additionally, God is so Holy He cannot lie. *"By two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us"* (Heb. 6:18; see Tit. 1:2). Because God is immutable He cannot change His nature. *"For I am the LORD, I do not change"* (Mal. 3:6; see Num. 23:19). Because God is Love, *"...there is no partiality with God"* (Rom. 2:11). Because God is Just, He cannot save sinners without the shedding of blood. *"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission"* (Heb. 9:22). God is the Creator who made man a free-moral agent with the freedom to choose between good and evil. This power of choice even includes man's right to make a choice concerning obedience to the Gospel. No matter how much God yearns for the salvation of the souls of men, God cannot save a man, a sinner, without man's consent.

If God is all-powerful, but is limited in what He can do such as never being able to tell a lie, does this not indicate a contradiction? No! It is only an apparent contradiction. Omnipotence does not indicate the prerogative to do every imaginable thing, but the capacity to do all those things which are the befitting objects of power and which is in agreement with His nature. Lying is inconsistent with His Holy nature. Therefore, God cannot lie without forfeiting His holiness. Since all men life and God never lies would demonstration of both His holiness and his omnipotence, and not evidence against His deity. Walter Kaufmann asked, "Is God unable to prevent suffering and thus not omnipotent? or is he able but not willing to prevent it and thus not merciful? And is he just?" Again, God's nature is one of all-power, mercy, love and justice. The argument about suffering fails to take into about the nature of man and sin.

Comfort in God's Omnipotence

The great power of God is strong motivation for weak and needy man to lift up his feeble arms to an Almighty God in prayer. He may not answer us what we want or when we want, but He is able to answer prayers offered up according to His will. No disease is too aggressive that He cannot heal it. No enemy is so mean He cannot change him into a friend. No temptation is so difficult, He cannot show us a way of escape (Ps. 27:1; Eph. 3:20,21; Mt. 6:13; 1 Cor. 10:13).

When Martin Luther was in defiance of the Catholic church, a cardinal wrote and asked him, "do you think the pope cares about the opinion of a German boar? Do you expect your princes to take up arms and defend a wretched worm like you? I tell you, No! And where will you be then?" Luther replied, "Where I am now - I the hands of the almighty God."

God has always been able to protect and save those who put their trust in His might power. David by God's power and protection slew Goliath. Jonathan was able to take on a Philistine garrison, believing God is able to save by many or by few (1 Sam. 14:6). He can protect men like Paul who was sent to Caesar and lived under constant threats to his life (2 Tim. 1:8-12). Serving a powerful God who can answer prayer and provide protection brings great comfort to any Christian.

Furthermore, our Almighty Father is the source of our strength. *"...In your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all"* (1 Ch. 29:12; see Ps. 68:35). Our God can make us strong enough to defeat Satan, death, sin, the world, etc.

Questions:

1. Define "omnipotent".
2. From where does God derive His power?
3. What Hebrew name for God describes His great strength?
4. What does "almighty" mean when used to refer to God?
5. How would you answer the skeptics attack on the omnipotence of God: "Could God create a rock so big and heavy that even He could not lift or move it?"
6. T F Jesus claimed it was totally and forever impossible for any rich man to go to Heaven.
7. By what means did God create all things?
8. Who is said to sustain the Creation of God? How?

9. Compare the power of God with that of the Devil in his use of temptation to lead men to commit evil.
10. How did God fulfill the seed promise in Genesis 3:15?
11. List the various types of miracles of Jesus which demonstrate His power?
12. Does the fact that all will not be saved impugn the attribute of God's omnipotence? Explain.
13. List those things which God cannot do. Explain why He cannot do these things?

Application and Discussion:

1. Have you personally witnessed the power of God answering prayers? Explain.
2. In what ways has God protected you personally?

God is Here

When a Russian cosmonaut entered space he looked out the window and reported, "I see neither God nor angels." This proves nothing for God is everywhere but cannot be seen by mere mortal eyes in space anymore than on earth. His statement is not faith shattering. In fact, if God had been discovered this would have posed a real issue for believers. Because God is not flesh and blood but spirit (Jn. 4:23,24). It is to no surprise that an unbeliever did not find God in space. When an American astronaut looked out the window he read Genesis 1:1, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* If a saint was sent to outer space, he would find God there just as he can find Him while still upon this earth. In fact, earth itself is hurling through space as it orbits the sun.

God is here whether we can see Him or not. He is everywhere and not limited to a finite location. Those seeking to locate Him in a specific location are not looking for the God of the Bible and Creator of this vast Creation.

Where Is God?

Once there was a preacher who loved to play golf but while working did not find much time to hit the greens. So, when he was on vacation far away from his home congregation, he decided just to go golfing one Sunday morning. After all, who is going to know. He walks up to the first hole and swings and it is a hole in one. He moves on to the second hole and the same thing happens. To his surprise he even does so through hole seventeen. An angel was watching all this and knew that God was causing this miracle. He came to God and said, "Why are you blessing this preacher with all these hole in ones? He is forsaking the assembly of the saints. And you are going to give him eighteen hole in ones." God simply replied, "Yes. But who is he going to tell."

God is here and near and everywhere. This is not pantheism. This is a doctrine which identifies God with the universe. To the pantheist God is everywhere in everything and is everything. God, is however, omnipresent or all present. He is everywhere at the same time.

Due to this attribute of God's eternal, unchanging nature, man cannot hide from God. *"There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves"* (Job 34:22). He is always near. God's presence is such that it can *"fill heaven and earth"* (Jer. 23:24).

All should be aware of the presence of God. Paul speaks of the remarkable accessibility of God in his address to the Athenians. *"So that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'"* (Acts 17:27,28). Paul Tillich a German theologian said, "The question of God is possible because an awareness of God is present in the question of God." All men of everyplace and throughout all time have at the very least contemplated the existence of God. The atheist who believes that there is not God anywhere has been the exception throughout all history and cultures.

Why do men have such a problem with the presence of God in the universe? A misunderstanding of the divine attribute of God's omnipresence is the issue. As physical beings we cannot divorce the idea of being in more than one place at the same time. God is eternal. He is not limited by time. He made time. He exist as a spirit outside the boundaries and limitations of time and space. God is not bound by location and time. Therefore, He can be in the same place or even all places at the same time.

Examples of God's Omnipresence

After Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit *“they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden”* (Gen. 3:8). They may have understood the guilt of sin and being separated from God, but they did not grasp the futility of hiding from His presence.

Several generations later a descendent of Adam named Enoch stood apart from most of the inhabitants of the earth. While the ante-diluvial world continued in their wickedness and rejection of God’s Will, *“Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him”* (Gen. 5:24). G. Campbell Morgan told of a little girl’s explanation of Enoch’s story: “One day God and Enoch went for an extra long walk, and they walked on and on, until God said to Enoch, ‘We’re closer to my house than to yours, you had better just come in and stay.’ And he went.”

During the divided Kingdom the prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a duel of sorts. Each were to offer a bull to their respective gods: the four hundred prophets to Baal and Elijah to Jehovah. Elijah was nice enough to let them go first. They were to prepare an altar and the sacrificial bull. Next, they were to pray to Baal to send fire down to consume the sacrifice. They cried out for hours in devotion to Baal, but he was a no show. No fire came from Baal. Elijah then taunts the hundreds of false prophets. *“And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.”* (1 Kings 18:27,28). Elijah’s turn came. He prepared an altar and the bull. He dug a ditch around the altar. Next, he poured water over the sacrifice, wood, and altar till it ran over and filled the ditch. This was all during a three and a half year drought. He prayed a little prayer to God and VHRROOOM! Fire came from never and consumed the bull, wood, altar and the water.

God has been able to be with his saints no matter what difficult circumstance or hazardous venue. He was with Abraham when he journeyed to a distant land. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh to demand the release of the Israelites God promised him *“I will certainly be with you”* (Ex. 3:11,12). He was with Noah while the flood waters raged upon the earth. He was with Lot when Sodom and the cities were destroyed with fire and brimstone. He was with Daniel in the lion’s den. He was with Paul on his perilous journey to Rome and when he had to appear alone before Caesar. He was even with Jonah who was curled up in the belly of a great sea creature.

The Omnipresence of God Discourages

Speaking of Jonah, this prophet of God was sent to preach a message of Divine warning to the wicked city of Nineveh. God told him, *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me”* (Jonah 1:2). Instead, *“Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD”* (1:3). First, God sent a great wind and tossed the boat. The superstitious sailor cast lots to see who was the jinks who brought upon them this disaster. He was there to manipulate the lots to point to Jonah. At Jonah’s pleading they tossed him into the sea. God was available again. He had prepared a great sea creature to swallow up Jonah for *“three days and three nights.”* While in the beast Jonah prayed to God. God was there to hear and answer the prophet. Jonah was vomited out upon dry ground.

Just as it would be futile to hide from a nuclear bomb dropped on your home, so Jonah failed to see the futility of hiding from an all-seeing God. Many sinners and criminals go unpunished every year because they are able to hide from authorities. Many thieves get away daily with stealing from their employer. God is not fooled. Men may be able to hide from men, but men cannot hide from God (Jer. 16:17; 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chr. 28:9). God is not like a man-made idol who can be nailed down and held fast in same temple. Remember, He is the God we sing about in the song: “There is an all-seeing eye watching you.”

Once there was a poor father walking down the country road when they came across a farmer’s watermelon patch. The father told his son to stand by the ditch while he crossed over into the field. First the father look this way and that way to see if anyone was watching him steal a big ripe watermelon. Just as the father bent down to pick up his booty his son cried out, “Dad, Wait! You forgot to look in one direction!” “Where?” the panicked father asked. The son replied, “you forgot to look up.”

If more people were cognizant of the watch eyes of an omnipresent God they would not steal, lie, commit adultery, etc. Being aware of a God who is always aware of us will discourage many sinful actions and words. Joseph is a good illustration of this. He was sold down into Egypt by his jealous brothers. He became a faithful steward over all that Potiphar owned. The wife of his master lusted after him and sought to commit adultery with her man-servant. Joseph rejected her advances with the following explanation: *"There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"* (Gen. 39:9). Whether or not Potiphar ever would find out about his sin was not an issue. Joseph was looking to a God who was always looking at him.

A couple may be parked in a car among the darkest of places but God sees. Saints on vacation may do things and go places thinking the brethren will never find out. A young Christian will go off to college and revel with the rebellious. An absentee worshiper may claim illness as the reason behind their failure to worship God when in fact they end up on the lake fishing. God can see in the dark parked cars. He will be found wherever one vacations. He knows where all the fish are in the lake and who is catching them. Only a self-deluded fool will try to hide from God.

The Omnipresence of God Encourages

Just as the knowledge of God's presence discourages us from sin, it can also be a reason to be encouraged. The Psalmist knew there was no place he could go without finding God. *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me"* (Ps. 139:7-10). It only takes two seconds for light to travel to the moon. Yet, if you could travel that fast, God will already be there before you arrive. No Christian no matter where they travel can distance themselves from God. Nothing can separate from Him and His love. Paul wrote, *"for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 8:38,39).

A congregation decided to stop having their regular prayer meetings on Sunday evening. One faithful couple asked if they could show up anyway. That Sunday the preacher asked them about their prayer service. They claimed five were present. He was shocked. I heard there were only the two of you who came. They explained, "well, we were the only ones physically present but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all present just the same."

How reassuring is the promise of Jesus. *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"* (Mt. 18:20). Just think of it if you knew that Jesus was coming again during the worship hour would you not attend? If the president of the United States was to be at worship services this coming Sunday, the building would be packed. Yet the King of kings and Lord of lords is with us every time we gather to worship in spirit and in truth. All men and women will make time to be anywhere and anytime their loving heart moves them to be with a loved one. Our love to be with the Lord can take us to worship just as we are counting on that same of to take us to heaven to worship.

A little girl was terribly afraid of the dark. Her parents assured her that God was everywhere and she had no need to be afraid of the dark if the God of light was there. So one night as she was about to enter her dark bedroom she was overheard to cry out into the darkness, "Okay God, I'm comin in." The knowledge of the presence of God is a source of great comfort (Ps. 46:5).

Not only is it comforting to know that God is everywhere, He has promised to be with every saint. Before His ascension into heaven Jesus promised His disciples *"...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:20). The Hebrew writer reminds us, *"let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'"* (Heb. 13:5,6).

The God of the Bible is not aloof or transcendent from His creatures and creation. He is near. He is here. He wants to be intimate and close with His children. The nearness of God allows God's

children to get closer to Him. God not only can be with us, He wants to be with us. *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you"* (Js. 4:8a). *"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit"* (Ps. 34:18). *"You are near, O Lord, and all Your commandments are truth"* (Ps. 119:161).

Some songs speak of this intimate companionship the children of God can have with their Heavenly Father. An example of such a song is Williams Cowper's "O for a closer walk with God,... nearer, my God, To Thee, Nearer to Thee! E'ven though it be a cross that raiseth me" and "nearer, still nearer, close to Thy heart, draw me my Savior, So precious Thou art." Another song which has a like theme is My God and I: "My God and I go through the fields together, we walk and talk as good friends should and do. We clasp our hands, our voices right with laughter. My God and I go through the meadow's hue."

Although the scriptures above promote the promise of having God near us, they are not promises without conditions. Note each of the second part of the verses. Each will demonstrate that the presence of God is conditioned upon our obedience to Him. *"...Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded"*(James 4:8b). *"...And saves such as have a contrite spirit"* (Ps. 34:18b). *"And all Your commandments are truth"* (Ps. 119:161b).

Some Places Where God Cannot Be Found

Just as God is all-knowing and there are things He does not know and He is all-powerful yet there are things He cannot do, God is everywhere but there are place He will not go (Gen. 4:16; 2 Ki. 13:23; 24:23; Jer. 23:39). This is not because of God's inability or a lack of these Divine traits. God was not with Cain who sinned, because *"Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden"* (Gen. 4:16). Though God sees all and hears all, there is still a sense in which God may not see or hear (Jer. 15:1; Ps. 34:15,16; Is. 1:15). The real issue as to why an ever-present God is not with some men and women is that He is perfectly Holy and they have chosen to sin. *"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear"* (Is. 59:1,2).

One place God will not be is in Hell. It is a place described where *"the unquenchable fire, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched"* (Mk. 9:43,44). Hell is the residence of the ungodly, wicked and vile. Satan and his angels will be there. God is not there. When Jesus comes again *"in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"* (2 Th. 1:8,9).

Remember, whether or not you are able to find God will not keep Him from finding you. All men will be found before God's judgment throne one day.

Questions:

1. Why could not the Russian Cosmonaut find God in space?
2. Is belief in an omnipresent God the same as pantheism? Explain.
3. Why do men have such a problem with the omnipresence of God in the universe?
4. Give some Bible examples of God's Omnipresence.

5. Show the ways God was with Jonah when he was on the run from his commission to preach to the Ninivites.

6. What motivated Joseph to rejected the temptation of Potiphar's wife?

7. T F If God is not present during our worship He is not being worshiped.
8. T F The knowledge of the presence of God is a source of great comfort.
9. What are some of the conditions to the promise of the presence of God?

10. Why was God not with Cain after the murder of Abel? Explain.

11. What keeps God from being near or intimate with men?

12. One place God will not be is in Hell. Read Acts 2:31: *"He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."* Explain.

Application and Discussion:

1. How would the knowledge and belief in the presence of God help in rejecting temptations in your life?

2. What might a worshiper do to keep his heart focused on the presence of God during worship services?

God is Love

The need to be loved is universal in the hearts of all men. Often it is wondered whether God really loves us. To the Jews of Malachi's day God said, *"I have loved you," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'"* (Mal. 1:2). During times of trials and tribulation it is easy for some to begin to doubt if God still loves them. Job said, *"Look, I go forward, but He is not there, And backward, but I cannot perceive Him; When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him"* (Job 23:8,9). By the end of this lesson it is hoped you will be reassured of God's love for you. And the only question left to answer is: "do you love God?"

Definition of Divine Love

Love is perhaps one of the most favorite attribute of God. Few seem to have a healthy understanding of His love. "Love" is a misused, misunderstood word. It has been commercialized and equated with sex. Robert Frost said, "There ought to be a quota on one's use of it." This has been true of love since the first-century. When the pagans thought of love, the Greek term agape was not the word that would have come to mind. The accepted the idea of brotherly love (phileo), romantic love (eros), and family love (storge). Agape love did not involve personal gain, it promoted the well-being of others ahead of itself.

Current society views love as a mere feeling. This emotion comes and goes based on circumstances and personal conditions. Although Paul does not give us a definition of love, he tells us what love does (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Love is active. It is the result of a will which chooses. Love is a choice not just a feeling.

Characteristics of Divine Love

◆ God's Love is Intrinsic

John, sometimes referred to as "the apostle of love," had a great deal to say about love in his Gospel and epistles. One of the most profound statements about God and love is: *"for God is love"* (1 John 4:8b). Notice John did not claim that "God had love" or "God will love" or "God is loving," but "God is love." Every other attribute of God's nature is influenced by this characteristic of the Divine. This does not mean that God is defined as love or summed up in the concept of love. God is more than just love. *"God is a consuming fire"* (Deut. 4:24). *"God is light"* (1 Jn. 1:5). *"God is the King"* (Ps. 47:7). *"God is Spirit"* (Jn. 4:24). *"God is Holy"* (Ps. 99:9). Love is such a part of God that without it He would cease to be God. He is the perfect manifestation of absolute love. He is the embodiment of love.

◆ God is the Source of Love

God is the source of all true love. *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love"* (1 John 4:7-8). Man would not know about love apart from a knowledge of God. Neither would man know how to love without God's revelation and example.

◆ God's Love is Everlasting

Love did not exist without God or before Him. God has always been and love has always been a part of His eternal nature. Jeremiah wrote, *"The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you'"* (Jer. 31:3).

A famous preacher went one day to visit a farmer who was a member of his Church. On a windmill on the farm were written the words, *God Is Love*. "Do you mean," asked the great preacher, "That your faith in God is dependent on the direction the wind is blowing." "No," said the farmer, "the

words mean that, regardless of which way the wind blows, God Is Love.”

◆ **God’s Love is Certain**

When my wife, Beverley, was working as A.S. Johnson Elementary school, I came to pick her up in the afternoon. We met in the hallway. She was cradling a baby Vietnamese potbelly pig in her arms and speaking baby talk to him. “This is Wilbur. Isn’t he sooo cute. I just love him.” For several weeks she would come home and talk about Wilbur the baby pot-belly pig. At the beginning of the next school year I asked her about Wilbur when I came to the school. She unemotionally said he was in the courtyard with the rest of the animals. When I saw Wilbur it became apparent why my wife was no longer crazy about Wilbur. He was 150 pounds of ugly, smelly swine. Her love or infatuation was over.

God’s love is not uncertain but sure and steadfast. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:35,39).

◆ **God’s Love is Motivating**

Why did God create the universe and earth? What did God create man? God is love and this requires someone to love. His love is the motive for the Creator creating creation for the creature who was made in His image: man. Out of love He gave man the freedom to choose. Motivated by His continued love for sinful man, God planned to redeem him. This is why God sent His Son. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). The reward of Heaven with God is also motivated by love.

Karl Barth, renown theology and philosopher, was asked what is the most profound thought he ever had: “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” God’s love for us even motivates us to love Him. *“We love Him because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19).

◆ **God’s Love Is Incomprehensible**

Paul wrote, *“know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”* (Eph. 3:19). How can one come to know the incomprehensible? The paradox is simply alluding to the fact that God’s love far surpasses man’s love and conception of it.

◆ **God’s Love is Universal**

In his work *The Sovereignty of God*, A.W. Pink wrote, “God loves whom He chooses. He does not love everybody...To tell the Christ-rejecter that God loves him is to cauterize his conscience, as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins. The fact is, that the love of God, is a truth for the saints only, and to present it to the enemies of God is to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs.”

Yet, Paul wrote that God shows love to those who are unlovable. *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom. 5:6-8). Paul himself was a recipient of this unconditional love. He persecuted Christians even to the point of having them killed. God showed mercy to him out of love for his soul. God hates the sin, but loves the sinner. Like a parent may have the rabies that threatens the life of their child. They may hate what it is doing to their child’s body. They will even hate the shots their child may have to suffer through. But they still love their child.

God wants all men to be saved. *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). We are encourage to pray for all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:1f).

◆ **God’s Love is Sacrificial**

Love is described by man was more of an involuntary reflex like the jerking motion of the arm, the crying out in pain, and the holding the hurting hand with the other which spontaneously results when one places their hand on a hot stove. Couples are said to “fall” in love at first sight. A girl is said to be swept off her feet by her lover. Yet, the love of God is a purposeful action. God chose to send His Son. Out of giving of self for man’s deepest need Christ left heaven, put up with thirty-three years of living in a sinful world, endured the abuses of His people, suffered the agony of scourging, and the excruciating pain of the cross. God’s love is one which is determined in the mind to give to the needs and well-being

of others. This is why God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). Because this is the very kind of love which is demonstrated in His loving sacrifice for us.

◆ **God's Love is Judicial**

How could a loving God allow so much pain and suffering in this world? Why would a God of love condemn any man to Hell? To some a loving God is an oxymoron. To others the existence of an all-powerful, loving God and the existence of evil and suffering is a paradox. Harry Emerson Fosdick resolved this by claiming God "has been an indulgent parent and when we have sinned, a polite "Excuse me" has seemed more than adequate to make amends." This does not take into account the other attributes of our loving Father such as His holiness, wrath, and justice. Others have compounded this apparent conflict by focusing merely on the wrath of God. Jonathan Edwards's sermon: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is seen as such an example. Just as the love of God cannot be preached to the exclusion of His holiness, Justice and wrath, the wrath of God cannot be proclaimed to the exclusion of His love. God is neither a harmless, over-tolerant grandfather or a stern, cruel and merciless ogre.

God is so holy, He must remain separated from sin. God shows His holiness by loving that which is good, he hates what is evil. Still God is merciful in that he loves the sinner while hating the sin. God is Just. Justice demands that all sin is punished and no sin goes unpunished. Therefore the wrath of God in judgment against sin is the manifestation of his holiness and justice. The Good News is, though God does not overlook sin and sinners, He has found a way to forgive them. Christ paid the penalty for sin satisfying God's holiness, justice, and wrath toward sin. When man obeys the terms of the Gospel God's love is shown in redeeming him from sin and the wrath of God. Only those who see themselves as sinners in the hands of an angry God can completely cherish the immensity and marvel of His love. Therefore the love of God and the wrath of God are not contradictory attributes. God longs for man to turn from sin and be loved and not die in sin. *"Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"* (Ezek. 33:11).

Demonstrations of Divine Love

▶ **God Sending His Son**

Everyone understands that love is more than just words. Love must be visibly expressed to the one loved by the lover. No better demonstration of this can be found than God sending Christ who in turn died on the cross for sinful man (John 3:16).

▶ **God Dying on the Cross**

The consummate proof of God's love is the cross. *"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him"* (1 John 4:9). Jesus Christ hanging on the cross is a sign of love and friendship with the world. *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends"* (Jn. 15:13).

▶ **God Saving the Lost**

To explain His motive in coming to this world Jesus said, *"for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). He illustrated this love for lost souls in the story of the shepherd who goes out to seek the single lost sheep out of ninety-nine. In the parable of the prodigal son the father awaits his son's return and runs out to meet him and welcome him home (Luke 15). God's love finds its fullest manifestation in Christ's provision for the salvation of sinful men. *"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him"* (Rom. 5:9).

▶ **God Adopting Us as Sons**

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 Jn. 3:1). God did not just save us and just add us to His church (Acts 2:47), He became a Father to us through adoption (Rom. 8:15-17). Parents love their children without obligation or conditions. Babies are loved before they are born and do nothing for their parents to merit this love. This is true in adoption.

▶ **God Caring for Our Needs**

A young child was trying to say the Lord's Model Prayer: "Our Father who art in Heaven, how do

you know my name.” The Father knows the names of all His children because He has loving care. He expressed His love by creating the universe and the world and all that is in it for man. He calls upon us to cast *“all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”* (1 Pet. 5:7). Tony Evans defined love as God’s “joyful self-determination to reflect the goodness of His will and glory by meeting the needs of mankind.” (*Our God is Awesome*, 276). He has promised *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Heb. 13:5b).

▶ **God Chastising His Children**

God gave us parents so we might understand love. They teach us the need for discipline. A parent will say, “You are my child, I’m going to have to wear your backside out because I love you.” The Hebrew writes quotes from the book of Proverbs, *“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Heb. 12:5,6).

Loved to Be Loving

● **Love for God**

Jesus was in Jerusalem in the final week of His ministry when the events recorded in Mark chapter twelve took place. It was Tuesday of that week. That day has been called “the great day of questions.” Jesus dealt with five questions. Matthew records Pharisees and lawyers asking Jesus questions tempting or testing Him. Chief priests, scribes, and elders asked by what authority He worked. He refused to tell them, probably because of their unbelief. The Pharisees and Herodians asked Him about giving God what was His, they marveled at His answer. Next, the Sadducees asked which of seven sisters married to a man in succession would be his wife after the resurrection. When He said none, they gave no response. A single scribe asked about the greatest commandment.

“Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’ Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’” This is the first commandment” (Mark 12:28-34). The extent of our love for God is great and extreme but is in no way as radical of the love God’s has shown us.

Choosing to love God is a thoughtful revolve on our part. Love is not without action. Merely claiming to love God verbally it not enough. Jesus said, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* (Jn. 14:15). John defined love: *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome”* (1 Jn. 5:3).

● **Love for Others**

To love fellow Christians involves more than mere lip service. It is interconnected and interdependent with many other things. According to John 13:34,35 you can only prove to the world that you are following Christ if you have the same kind of love for the brethren that He has shown by giving His life for all men. A study of Christ’s love for others will reveal what your love should be. *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* Christ gives His disciples a new commandment. This is not the first time they were told to love others by God. However, it is the first time they were told to do so in the likeness of Christ’s love for mankind. He makes godly love a kind of litmus test for the true Christian.

As a true disciple of Christ you will learn the love of Christ and apply that love to each other. By loving the sinner. By loving those who hate you. By loving in spite of one’s health, physical appearances, personality, education, race, etc. Remember, Christ loves them and if you don’t love them you are not a disciple of Christ. This is the reason we are commanded to love our enemies. *“That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* (Mt. 5:45). When you find it hard to love someone, stop ask “can God love this person?”

Again, true love is not just an emotion it is a duty which must be taught. *“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one*

another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

- **Love for Truth**

A blacksmith's apprentice learned how to do just about everything. Unfortunately, when he started out on his own in a distant village, he could do the simplest thing because the blacksmith failed to teach him how to spark the fire. Novices are often taught the fundamentals of being a Christian, but have no knowledge of how to spark the fire of love for God's truth in their hearts or others. Paul spoke of those who will perish in unrighteousness, "*because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*" (2 Thess. 2:10). Christians are to love truth and righteousness in the Word of God (Rom. 6:17,18; Ps. 1:2).

- **Love for self**

Loving self is not the same as that which Paul condemns in 2 Tim. 3:1-5 "lovers of themselves". These are those who are self-centered and selfish.

Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor "*as thyself*" (Mt. 22:37-39; 19:19). Paul and others taught this same commandment (Rom. 13:9; Js. 2:8). Paul tells us that the law is fulfilled in this command (Gal. 5:14) and that "*husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies, he who loves his wife loves himself*" (Eph. 5:28). The Golden Rule implies a love of self (Mt. 7:12).

How much do you love me God? "This much!" And He spread his arms and was nailed to the cross for me.

Questions:

1. What are the four Greek words for love? Which one best represents God's love for man?
2. Explain that God is more than just love.
3. How certain or sure is God's love for us?
4. What has God's love motivated Him to do? How does His love motivate us?
5. How can God hate the sin, but love the sinner?
6. Give examples of God's or Christ's sacrificial love for sinful man.

7. How can the wrath of God be reconciled with the God of love?
8. How is the cross a manifestation of God's great love for man?
9. Explain how God's love for man is like that of a parents for a child.
10. What does chastisement from the Lord prove?
11. To what extent is man to love God?
12. What new commandment did Jesus give His disciples? What is it new?
13. T F Christians are never to love themselves.

Application and Discussion:

1. God has demonstrated His love for us time and again. How have you demonstrated your love for God in the past month?
2. All of us have people in our lives who are difficult to love. Knowing that "God is Love" how can we learn to love everyone?

God is Holy

The words *sanctify*, *sanctification*, *saint*, *holy*, and *holiness* are all derive from this same root in the Greek (*hagios*) and thus carry related meanings. Holiness means "set apart." To be holy is "to be separate or distinct." In holy matrimony, for example, a man and a woman are set apart, abandoning all others as they yoke solely to each other. As saints we are to be different. We live differently, speak differently. We wear different clothing and even think differently. All because we have a different hope than the rest of the world. We live holy because we recognize definite boundaries of moral thought and actions that separates us from the rest of the world.

Extent of God's Holiness

No other attributes of God's nature is ascribed to Him more than that of "Holy." It is the very centerpiece of His nature. The holiness of God permeates all Divine attributes. His name is holy (Psalm 97:12). God is the Holy Father (John 17:11). His power is a "*holy arm*" (Psa 98:1). "Power is God's hand or arm, omniscience His eye, mercy His bowels, eternity His duration, but holiness is His beauty" (Stephen Charnock). God is referred to as "*Holy, Holy, Holy*" (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). This represents an emphatic statement pointing out the importance of recognizing God is totally holy. He is infinitely holy.

God is perfect in holiness. Yet, holiness is used in two distinct ways which apply to the nature of God. He is holy in that God is separated from all things that are unholy and created. God is not the same as the universe or creation. To be holy is to be distinct, separate, in a class by oneself. God has no rivals or competition. "*There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides Thee, Nor is there any rock like our God*" (1 Samuel 2:2). God is unique. He "*who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen*" (1 Timothy 6:16). His holiness is incomparable. "*Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?*" (Ex. 15:11).

Secondly, God is holy because He is totally free of sin and darkness. The ancient pagan religions spoke of the holy in relation to their man-made gods. A thing or person as regarded as holy only because of its association with a particular god. Therefore, even men and women who served as temple prostitutes were called "holy women" or "holy men" (Genesis 38:21; I Kings 14:24). Yet, with the God of the Bible holiness represents the purity of His character. The apostle John wrote "*this then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5). In the Greek John uses a double negative to declare God's purity from sin. James further shows how far removed God is from sin and temptation. "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed*" (James 1:13-14). "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*" (Hab 1:13).

Man often has graded sins based on his understanding of their degrees of wickedness. Thus, a little lie is less serious an offence against our Holy God than adultery or murder. Although there are degrees in the consequences of sin, God does not see sin as man does. He puts the teller of little white lies on the same level as the darkest criminal. From man's perspective this is unfair. However, "if you were high above the earth and saw one man standing on a mountain top and another standing in the valley, they would look to you as if they were standing side by side. You would be so high that the small matter of mountain would be irrelevant. God is so high that while one person may be living better than the dregs of society, from God's separate, unique, high position, all stand on level ground. That's why the Bible says, 'There is none righteous not even one' (Rom. 3:10). 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (v. 23)." (Tony Evans, *Our God is Awesome*, 81,82).

Manifestation of God's Holiness

There are many other ways God has manifested His holiness other than being totally separated from sin. Mary the mother of Jesus declared of God, *"for He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name"* (Lk. 1:49). This holiness is the reason taking the Lord's name in vain is wrong. *"You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you"* (Lev 22:32). All that God does is Holy. He is *"holy in all His works"* (Ps. 145:17). The Law of the Lord is holy. *"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good"* (Rom. 7:12). He even has sworn by His Holiness. *"Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David"* (Ps. 89:35).

God shows His holiness by the fact He must dwell in a holy place separated from that which is contaminated by sin. He dwells the holy place and the Holy of holies of the tabernacle and the temple. He dwelt in His holy city Jerusalem and among a holy people and nation. *"For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you"* (Deut. 23:14).

God holiness is even manifested in His wrath. He has an abhorrence to sin. *"The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD"* (Prov 15:26). Thus, God must be a holy judge and punish the wicked by separating them from those who are holy and that which is holy to God. Adam and Eve were removed from the garden. Korah and those who rebellion were destroyed from among those in the camp. Those who did not repent from worshiping the golden calf were put to death by the swords of the Levites. Ananias and Saphira were removed from the congregation by death for lying to God. Nadab and Abihu the priest and sons of Aaron were destroyed with fire from God for offering strange or perverse fire in offering incense. By way of explanation *"Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me, I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' So Aaron held his peace"* (Lev 10:3). The holiness of God demands that He judge sin. The cross is a manifestation of the holiness of God. He sent forth a holy sacrifice to atone for sin. Even eternal punishment of the wicked in hell represent the Holy God who is separate from those who do evil.

Man's Response to God's Holiness

Man would have never created a God as Holy has the one described in the Bible. His holy nature distinguishes Him from all the man-made gods. *"Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?"* (Ex. 15:11). Throughout the scriptures those who have come in contact with God's holiness and see His glory become very uncomfortable. Why? Because it remains us all of how little we are like the Holy One. From the very beginning of sin man hid himself for the Holy God. Job realizing his relationship to the Holy One said, *"Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth"* (Job. 40:4). When the Holy One of Israel appeared at Mount Sinai the whole mountain shook violently and the people made Moses approach God for them out of great fear (Ex. 19:16-18). Isaiah witnessed the Holy throne of God and responded with *"woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts"* (Is. 6:5).

God is so holy in comparison to His creatures that man often responds to God in hate. God is too holy for sinful man to maintain an egotistical self-esteem. The correct response to how holy God is, is for man to recognize his sinfulness and confess his sins before God. When Peter witness the great catch of fish at the Lord Jesus' command *"he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'"* (Luke 5:8). John warned Christians of the need to recognize the fact that they will sin and need to confess this fact before God. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ...If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"* (1 John 1:8, 10).

Just as Moses explained to Aaron when his sons were destroyed by fire from heaven, the God of Heaven *"must be regarded as holy."* The first think Moses learned about approaching God is that He

is holy and even the ground before Him is holy. Therefore, Moses was told to take off his shoes (Exodus 3:5). All the saints should gain a knowledge of God's holiness. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding"* (Prov. 9:10). Attaining such knowledge will produce reverential fear. *"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested"* (Rev. 15:4). Such a Holy God should be praised. *"Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name"* (Ps. 30:4). God is worthy of all worship for His holiness. *"Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the Lord our God is holy"* (Ps. 99:9). *"Give to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!"* (1 Chron. 16:29). Not everything a Christian does is Worship. Worship is a special separate time when one approaches God as He has commanded. The sanctified sons and daughters of God must even present their bodies as holy before their Holy Father (Rom. 12:1,2; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19).

Be Holy - as God Is Holy

Once an impeccably dressed Englishman was standing in line at an airline reservations counter when a pushy woman cut in front of him, smacked down her ticket and insist on an upgrade to first class. "Madam," the Englishman said as he picked up the ticket and pressed it back into her hand, "First Class is not a boarding pass. It is a way of life." Likewise, holiness is a way of life not just a privilege we are born into.

We have been called to be holy. *"He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'"* (1 Pet. 1:15,16). Peter used the word "called" often in his first letter (1:15; 2:9; 2:21; 3:9; 5:10). He presents Leviticus 11:44,45 demonstrating that Israel was called to be holy. They were to separate themselves from the pagan population restraining themselves from idolatry and immorality. The book of Leviticus is a book on holiness. It tells God's holy people how to be separated unto a Holy God. For example, they are took in detail what to eat and even how to prepare their food.

All our conduct is to be holy. Being holy is not something that we can restrict to one place or one building. To the Christian, every day is supposed to be a holiday or "holy day." Holiness is to encompass all thoughts, all words, and all deeds. Whether it be Sunday morning at worship or Saturday night at the ball game or Monday morning at work God's children must be holy.

The motive for being holy is because God is holy. God, Himself is our standard of holiness. The standard of holiness is not conforming to the world's standard. God does not conform to man's idea of holiness. He is the standard. Only God can be our standard of holiness. The word "I" in the quotation "I am holy" is emphatic in the Greek text, signifying, "I, myself, apart from all others, am holy." He is the grand model. The sole ground or basis for holiness. God is not just holy, holiness is the essential nature of God's character (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). Although we do not reach the prefect state of holiness in that we never sin (1 John 1:7-10) we strive to be holy just like God. He is so holy that He cannot be tempted by sin (Js. 1:13f), yet we can. God is so Holy He never tempts man to sin. God cannot sin. God is so holy He does not separate Himself from the truth and tell or support a lie. Being holy like God demands we be truthful at all times. Being holy like God is holy consists of thinking as God thinks and making God's Will our will. So, the better we know God the better we can be holy. To be holy even involves the sons and daughters to accept the chastisement of God the Father. *"For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness"* (Heb. 12:10).

The only way any man will have access to God or have hope in life eternal is for him to be holy. Christians are to *"pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord"* (Heb. 12:14). We have access to the Father through Christ. We put on Christ in baptism. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:27). Sinful man just clean up his life before being able to approach the Holy Father. The only cleaning agent able to accomplish this task is the blood of Christ.

Questions:

1. T F The words sanctify, sanctification, saint, holy, and holiness are all derived from different words in the Greek New Testament.
2. Give your own definition of "holy."
3. Why is God referred to as "Holy, Holy, Holy" several times in the New Testament?
4. In what two ways can God's nature be considered holy?
5. What does it mean "God is light"?
6. List several ways in which God has demonstrated His holiness.
7. What is the connection between God's holiness and His wrath, justice, and the need for an eternal Hell?
8. How did various men and women in the Bible react when they encountered the great holiness of God? Why?
9. Why did God destroy Nadab and Abihu for offering up strange fire at the altar of incense?
10. What are the correct responses to the holiness of God?
11. What is the motive for the saints to be holy?

12. Just how holy is God (see James 1:13-15)?

13. Why should the sons and daughters of God accept His divine discipline in our lives?

Application and Discussion:

1. In what ways can Christian present and keep their bodies holy before the Lord?

2. What other things are holy or separated unto the Lord? How do we treat these things as holy before the Lord?

God is Glorious

Several years ago I asked a class of young adults to tell me what they thought was the chief goal of the New Testament Church. The most common answer given was: "Evangelism - saving lost souls is the number one mission of the church." However, I asked why is this the number one mission of the church. Is it not to please God? In reference to Christ Paul wrote, "*to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever*" (Eph 3:21). In turn Christ died to present His bride a "*glorious church*" (Eph. 5:27). The chief duty of the church is to glorify God who made it glorious. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God." The Bible is filled with passages which support this idea.

The Glory of God

Man's obligation before God is to bring glory to Him through an obedient life of faith in Christ. Just what does it mean to glorify God? In the Old Testament there are about twenty-five words in the Hebrew which are translated *doza* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). A few of the more common ones are *kabod*, *tipheret*, *hadar*, *hod*, *sebi*. Most frequently the word means difficult, heavy, worthy, honorable, weighty, etc. It is a term which can be also applied to the reputations describing the great fame and fortune of men. Joseph's glory as second in command in Egypt (Gen. 45:13) and Haman's position given to him by Artaxerxes in the Persian court (Esther 5:11).

According to Vine's the Greek term *doza* means "Glory (from *dokeo*, to seem), primarily signifies an opinion, estimate, and hence, the honor resulting from a good opinion..." (Vine 483). It is derived from *dokeo* which in the classical Greek. It literally means "opinion" or "reputation." It is the estimate or opinion which one may place on the reputation of someone or something. However, this is not just a personal opinion of man when it comes to the honor and reputation of God. The greatness of God's glory is considered an objective fact in the Bible. All men are called upon by Scripture to have a good opinion or estimate of God based on the facts of who He is and what He has done. God, like any famous personality, has great glory among men because of all those who have a positive belief about Him.

However, God's glory, unlike man's, is rooted in His Being and not subject to the capricious feelings of men toward Him. For example, one day man will praise Him, and the next he will utter blasphemies. Glory belongs to God intrinsically or inherently. As the Heavenly host proclaimed: "*Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen*" (Rev. 7:12; cf. 4:11). Man cannot glorify Jehovah in the sense of adding anything to the essential glory of God. The glory of God is such that if it be taken away, He is no longer God. In contrast, a man may be striped of almost every virtue and significance, yet still be a man.

When men glorify something it is a representation of the value they have placed upon it. Whether it be a car, a movie star or a philosophical saying. The more it is valued, the more it is glorified. God's value in the heart of a man goes up the more he truly knows Him. Although, he is not increasing His value by how much he glorify Him.

Further, the term *doxazo* means to glorify, magnify, extol, praise. It is honoring or crediting someone or something with greatness. Commercials are an attempt by companies to glorify their product to the public. Actors long to have their names up in lights and be given top credits for their works. A ring can be taken to a jeweler and its value is appraised based on its qualities. This is done when man sees the various great attributes of God, such as, His loving-kindness, grace, love, wisdom, power, etc. and greatly then values it. He then expresses his estimate of God by some deed or attitude. It is like the little prayer our family used when us children first learned to pray: "God is Great, God is

Good, Let us thank Him for our food." God is justly due glory through prayers of thanksgiving because He is the giver of all good things (Js. 1:17).

Man's estimate or opinion of God increases the more he comes to know what God is and what God has done and is doing. God's greatness can always be contrasted with man's weakness. After all, God is perfectly Holy. *"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested"* (Rev. 15:4). Yet, all men have sinned and come short of the Glory of God (Rom. 3:23). When Isaiah was faced with the scene of God's Throne, one of the seraphim said, *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"* Isaiah responded, *"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips"* (Isaiah 6:3,5). God is so holy no lie can ever be attributed to Him. *"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth"* (Ps. 115:1). He is also known for His faithfulness. *"O Lord, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, For You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth"* (Is. 25:1). This is in contrast to man who is often void of truth and unfaithful in his ways and judgments. All that God is and has done is worthy of glory. This can be seen in His Creation. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork"* (Ps. 19:1). *"You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created"* (Rev. 4:11). The reason God is due all glory for all Creation is because of all of His honorable attributes, such as, holiness, mercy, truth, faithfulness, creations and all His wondrous works. His very name is due all glory. *"Give to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!"* (1 Chron. 16:29).

Glory is not only due to God the Father but to God the Son. Since Christ is and has always been God and has all the attributes of deity, He too is worthy to be glorified by man. This is even true of the incarnate Son of God/Son of Man. *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn. 1:14). In fulfilling His mission on earth to save mankind from sin He was glorified by the Father before all the world. This can be seen in the signs and wonders He performed and at the Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16). He also glorified the Father through His obedience to the Father's Will. *"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do"* (Jn. 17:14). Four days before the crucifixion God spoke from Heaven *"Then a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again'"* (Jn. 12:28). This He said in reference to the His Son's name. The glory of Christ can even be seen in the humility of His death. *"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone"* (Heb. 2:9). Later, at His ascension He was taken up in glory and is now and forever in glory at God's right hand.

All men of all ages should render to God the glory due Him. This is true of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although space does not permit us to explore the Glory of the Holy Spirit, He is God and thus has the Glory of God.

Glorifying God

All glory belongs to God. God is worthy of all glory. All Christians and the church are to give glory to God. Just how does a Christian glorify God?

✓ **By Doing All to Glorify Him**

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Eating and drinking can be done in a way that degrades the Father. The Corinthian Christians were not to take eating and drinking for granted. They needed to remember that whatever they chose to do, they needed to give thought as to whether or not God would be glorified by their actions.

✓ **By Relying on His Promises**

As Christians we will often offer up praise to God by singing a song. *"Standing on the Promises...I cannot fall...that cannot fail."* By trusting in God to keep His promises we like Abraham glorify God. God had made several promises to Abraham as he was leaving Ur and headed for the land

God would eventually give his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). These promises were to be fulfilled through his son Isaac. However, God asked that he take his only son of promise and sacrifice him. Abraham *“did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God”* (Rom. 4:20).

✓ **By Praising Him**

As Christians, we *“should be to the praise of His glory”* (Eph. 1:12). Praise is one of the most common ways men show glory to God in the Bible. This is frequently the means by which we promote our opinions about people whom we admire in modern day society. Often this is done when we gather to sing songs of praises (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Throughout time heroes have been immortalized in song for generations to sing.

✓ **By Bearing Much Fruit**

Jesus told His disciples, *“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples”* (Jn. 15:8). A farmer who puts time, money, and effort into sowing and growing crops in his fields wants to see a harvest. The bigger the harvest the happier the farmer. God did not have the seed of the Gospel sown among the hearts of men without the expectation that they would bear fruit. A farmer is seen as foolish who wastes his time on growing plants that will not produce anything of value.

✓ **By Our Faithfulness**

“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 4:11). Keep in mind that glory belongs to God whether we as Christians glorify Him or not. Yet, when we speak, our words must be compatible with God’s Word. If God says one thing and His children say other, God is made to look the liar and is not glorified as Truth. When we serve, we must do so according to the abilities given by God. When Christians neglect opportunities to serve, it makes God look bad.

✓ **By Glorifying Christ**

Paul prayed for the spiritual growth and well-being of the Thessalonians *“that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Th. 1:12). We wear the name of Christ. Whatever we say or do reflects on Him.

✓ **By Suffering For Christ**

The enemies of Christ persecuted and executed Him, it was not to bring glory to the Son of God. However, because of prophecies being fulfilled in Him, death being defeated by the resurrection, yet while facing severe suffering, Christ was glorified. Likewise, many of His followers will experience suffering for the name of Christ. If they are innocent of any wrong-doing they can bring glory to God. *“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter”* (1 Pet. 4:14-16).

✓ **By Giving Thanks**

Luke tells the story of ten lepers who came to Jesus (Lk. 17:15-19). The Son of God healed them. They all went their way to show they were free from the dreaded disease to the priests, so they could return to family and friends. Only one of them, a Samaritan, returned to Jesus and gave thanks. His glorifying was verbal. He prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus. Jesus further blessed him with forgiveness, because he glorified God. Jesus said that this one man was whole. He didn’t say that the other nine were whole.

✓ **By Showing Unity and Mutual Respect**

Children who bicker and fuss discredit their parents. Disunity among God’s children discredits the family name of Christ. When God’s children are perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment - God is glorified. *“Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom. 15:5,6).

✓ **By Our Physical Bodies**

Those Christians living in the ancient city of Corinth had to deal with gross hedonistic immorality. A thousand temple prostitutes were available for men to worship their gods through fornication. The attitude toward satisfying the desires of the flesh were expressed in this saying, "*Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods*" (1 Cor 6:13). So when it came to the sexual desires of men and women, many felt that the body was given for the purpose of sexual gratification. In other words, "sex for the body and the body for sex." Paul explains that this view is not the will of the Creator or the Savior. Instead of running off into the world to satisfy the desires of the flesh, they were to "*flee sexual immorality*". Our bodies must be kept pure for God's glory. "*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

✓ **By Worshipping God**

God is to be worshiped and given glory (Rev. 14:7). Today, man thinks that worship is not focused on the glory of God, but the will of the worshipers. Worship in small congregations to the mega-church to tele-evangelism is being tailor to fit the desires of the audience. God's priests, Nadab and Abihu, worshiped Him before the people and used profane fire to burn incense "*before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord*" (Lev. 10:1,2). Moses had just lost his two nephews and he turns to his brother Aaron and says, "*This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'* So Aaron held his peace" (Lev. 10:3). Worship is not all about what the worshipers want. God is the only audience in true worship. All true worshipers are spectators glorifying God through what He wants. Our concerns are not how the worshipers enjoyed the worship experience, instead we want God to be able to say of the worship He receives, "Oh, that was good. I enjoyed that?" This is accomplished by always worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Are our services tailored to glorify God or Man?

✓ **By Confessing the Truth**

Whereas Satan is the author of all lies, Christ in contrast is the Truth (Jn. 14:6). Men often lie, but God never lies and never can lie. Truth does not come from within man, it comes from God. Truth is not situational or subjective, it is absolute and eternal. When men recognize the truth and proclaim it God is given the glory. At the cross "*the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!'*" (Lk. 23:47).

✓ **By Obeying God**

Some are under the impression God is glorified simply by saying they are glorifying Him regardless of what they do. God is glorified when His people do His will, as it is revealed. When an employee fails to do his best and his work is slipshod, it casts a bad reflection on his supervisor. When the employee does well, the manager is respected and praised. Mere lip service to God's greatness is meaningless unless the glorifier of God is willing to do what God commands. Jesus once said to those who gave lip service, "*But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46).

✓ **By Letting Our Light Shine**

Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). Our light shines by doing good works which can be seen by this dark world. Peter put it this way, "*having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation*" (1 Pet. 2:12).

Questions:

1. According to Paul the chief mission of the church is to...In your own words define "glory" as it is used in relationship to God in the Old and New Testaments.

2. How is it that God's glory is inherent?
3. Give examples from life of things which are glorified. For example, commercials will "glorify" a product to the public.
4. List the various reasons all glory is due to God the Father?
5. When, where, and why did Christ receive glory?
6. T F Trusting in the promises of God is one of many ways to glorify Him.
7. What is perhaps the most common way Christians glorify God?
8. How is God glorified when Christians bear fruit in their lives?
9. How does the unfaithfulness of God's children make Him look bad?
10. Why does the life of a persecuted Christian bring glory to God?
11. Can denominations give glory to God? Can striving and divisive brethren give glory to God? Explain.
12. Why should a Christian use his body in a way to glorify God?
13. How did the sons of Aaron fail to glorify God in worship?

15. T F God is glorified in what we say and what we do. Both our deeds and words must be compatible with each other and God's Will.

Application and Discussion:

1. What can one do to help them to better see and appreciate the great glories of God?
2. What can you do in day to day life to proclaim and express your estimate of the great value of God?

God is Just

In Genesis 18 God revealed to Abraham His plans to destroy Sodom and the cities of the plain because of their great wickedness. Abraham's righteous nephew Lot lived in Sodom. So a conversation between God and Abraham ensued regarding the fate of Sodom. *"And Abraham came near and said, 'Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'"* (Gen. 18:23-25). Yet in Genesis nineteen not even ten righteous people could be found in Sodom. So a just God rained down fire and brimstone upon the cities of the plain. Abraham's intercessory prayer focused on a key attribute of God's character: the righteousness or just nature of God.

God is a just Judge of all the earth and He always does what is right. God's righteousness refers to His fairness, His impartiality, and His justice. He is no *"respector of persons"* (Rom. 2:11; Eph. 5:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17; Acts 10:34,35). God possesses the quality of fairness to a perfect degree. No one can sustain a charge of unfairness against God.

The enemies of God have often complained of God being unjust. David while suffering under the punishments of God confessed sinner *"against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge"* (Psalm 51:4). Justice and righteousness is an inherent part of the very nature of God (Is. 45:21). It is the habitation of His throne (Ps. 89:14). His justice is said to be abundant (Job 37:23); certain (Zeph. 3:5); unparalleled (Job 4:1); immutable (Job 34:12); upright (Deut. 10:17); unbiased (Jer. 32:19); and without prejudice (Rom. 2:11). God is seen to be just in all His ways, forgiveness, plan of redemption, His judgments, and even the final judgment.

God's Just Treatment of Man

From the very beginning of the Bible to the end God's just judgment and wrathful sentence against the wicked can be seen. God warned Adam and Eve not to eat of one particular tree in the Garden. Yet when they did, God rightly punished them (Gen. 3:16f). They were cast out of the Garden and not given access to the tree of life. In the Revelation 21:8 God promises to condemn those who practice wickedness. These will also be refused access to the tree of life.

Adam and Eve's sons Cain and Abel worshiped God. Yet Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable to God and he became angry. God told him, *"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it"* (Gen. 4:7). These questions demonstrate that a standard of right and wrong existed to which Cain and Abel were amenable. God's rejection of Cain was not arbitrary or capricious. The apostle John warned the saints to be *"not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous"* (1 John 3:12).

During the days of Noah *"the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gen. 6:5). Therefore, God *"did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly"* (2 Pet. 2:5). He literally *"waited"* in the days of Noah to punish the wicked (1 Pet. 3:20). Peter tells us why He waited. *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9). However, only Noah and his family (a total of eight souls) were saved in the ark. In the end God *"destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both*

man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive" (Gen. 7:23). Did the Judge of all the earth do right?

When God's chosen people had been in Egyptian bondage for many years God sent Moses to request of Pharaoh: *"Let my people go."* Pharaoh refused. God sent one cataclysmic plague after another: blood, frogs, lice, flies, animals disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and death of all the first born. In the end He drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Did the Judge of all the earth do right?

"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 10:1,2). How can this be just? How does a father like Aaron handle seeing God destroy his two sons with fire? *"Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace"* Lev. 10:3).

While Moses was up on the Holy Mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel were in the valley below breaking the Ten Commandments. Aaron encouraged the people to worship the Golden Calf (Ex. 32). Those Israelites who did not repent of this idolatry were killed by the swords of the Levites. About three thousand perished that day. Did the Judge of all the earth do right?

Later in Numbers chapter eleven the people complained and God sent fire to burn among the camp. They had a history of murmuring. First the water was bitter. They wanted soft drinks. Next God sent manna six days a week to feed them. Now they are murmuring "where's the beef." They wanted more than just manna, they wanted meat. So Moses said *"for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, 'Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?'"* (Num. 11:20). *"But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague"* (Num. 11:33).

The rest of the book of Numbers is filled with illustrations of God pouring out His wrath upon the wickedness of His people. Moses' sister Miriam disapproved of Moses Ethiopian wife, so God struck her with leprosy (Num. 12:1,2). Later, twelve spies were sent into Canaan. Ten brought back a negative report that the land of promise could not be taken (Num. 12:32f). They made plans to return to Egypt (14:4). They were again guilty of murmuring (14:27). They were punished with forty years of aimless desert meandering until the entire adult population died off. The ten spies died by plague (14:37). In Numbers sixteen Korah, Dathan, Abiram and 250 popular leaders of the congregation conspired together against Moses' leadership. The ground split apart underneath the tents of the three ringleaders of the rebellion and swallowed them and their families up and the earth closed over them. God then sent fire down out of the atmosphere and burned to death the 250 leaders. When Moses struck the rock twice instead of speaking to the rock it still produced water for the murmuring Israelites. Yet for this disobedience God would not allow Moses to enter the Promise Land (Num. 20). *"And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread'"* (Num. 21:5). God sent in among the camp venomous snakes whose burning bite was fatal. When the men of Israel sinned with pagan women 24,000 died by a plague (Num. 25). Did the Judge of all the earth do right?

Time and again God sent the nations against the Israelites when they disobeyed Him during the time of the judges. Eventual the kingdom of Israel was divided into two separate nations. Due to their persistent idolatry the ten northern tribes went into Assyrian captivity. *"Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone"* (2 Kings 17:18). One hundred and fifty years later the kingdom of Judah was attacked by the Babylonian Empire. They deported them into foreign slavery for seventy years. Did the Judge of all the earth do right?

Some may be tempted to argue that all these illustrations of God's wrathful judgment upon the wicked come from the Old Testament. Whereas the God of the Old was full of wrath the God of the New Testament is full of Grace. This is a false representation of God. There are several illustrations of God punishing the wicked in the New Testament. Jesus promised the end of Jerusalem and the Temple in Matthew 24. The language used to described that judgment is very similar to the very language used in the Old Testament for the destruction of wicked nations. When Ananias and Saphirra agreed together

to lie to God. They were confronted and both dropped dead at the feet of the apostle Peter (Acts 5:1-11). After Herod Agrippa I had killed James the apostle, he claimed the glory belonging to God alone during a speech. God sent worms which ate him up (Acts 12). When Elymas the Sorcerer withstood the preaching of the Gospel by Paul, he was struck blind (Acts 13:11). Did the Judge of all the earth do right in the New Testament?

Arguments Against an Eternal Hell

Some will argue that an eternal Hell is contrary to the nature of a just God. It is argued God would be unjust to punish men eternally for sins committed over a few decades. Yet, man is too sinful or foolish to see His justice. "Who hath known the mind of God or who hath been His counselor?" (Rom. 11:34). The principles of good and evil are eternal. Justice requires eternal happiness as a reward for good. The punishment for evil is eternal misery. Nothing short of this will appease Divine Justice. God is not saving Hell to spring on us as a surprise on Judgment Day. Man has been thoroughly and lovingly warned (Lk. 12:4,5). No one will go there by accident. They fail to realize that there are many things we do not want, but that justice nevertheless demands. In 2 Peter 3:9, God is not willing that any should perish, but verse ten says many will perish.

Punishment reinforces the justice of God, it does not violate His justice. In Psalm 50, God speaks to the wicked (those guilty of stealing, adultery, slander, deceit) and says in verse twenty-one, "These things you have done, and I kept silence: You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes." Because God had not immediately punished their wickedness, the transgressors assumed that He was just like them; no holier, no purer, and just as indifferent to sin. Adam and Eve knew that it would be possible to hide from one another in the garden, so they thought they could hide from God (Gen. 3:10). Ananias and Sapphira knew that it was possible to lie to men, so they thought they could lie to God (Acts 5). God is not slack concerning His promise as men are (2 Pet. 3:9).

Critics of an eternal Hell argue, "Eternity is too long to punish the wicked. It is unjust to punish a man eternally for sins committed in so short of time." Can one really envision a judge sentencing a thief to prison for a period of time not to surpass the number of minutes it took him to steal? Does anyone sincerely think it violates justice to sentence a murderer to a prison stretch measured in years when the murder was committed in a matter of minutes? The fact is the time it takes to commit a crime has nothing to do with determining the duration of punishment. Our system of law demands that the criminal be punished in relationship to the magnitude of the crime committed, and not the amount of time it took to perpetrate the crime. Remember, the greatest crime is spurning the greatest gift God has ever given man, that is, eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ. How long should one suffer for this is ingratitude.

Some argue, "No human parent would inflict such a punishment upon his child for a crime." Neither would we punish a child as severe as nature will. (Examples: Drugs, fingers in wall plugs, drinking and driving, etc.) A teenager drinks too much at a party, drives his car into the headlights of a semi-trailer and is a paraplegic for life. A few moments of promiscuity can cause some dreaded disease to begin its awful spread. Actions often have outcomes that go far beyond their immediate cause. If they had the power to prevent it, how many human fathers would allow their children to be born horribly deformed? God who has such power, does allow these things to happen to His creatures. God even permits such things to happen to some of the most godly of saints. Our point is: what God will allow to happen cannot be determined on the basis of what finite and time-bound creatures, such as you and I, would permit to happen.

The truth is God has not changed. The God of the Old is still the God of the New. It cannot be argued today that "God loves us too much to send us to hell." Even the saints of today may think that God will overlook their disobedience and reward them despite their sinfulness. This too is a false hope.

Justice and Mercy of God

Although God is a Just Judge and exacting wrathful vengeance upon the wicked. He is a God who is full of grace. He punished Adam and Eve but also gave them the Seed Promise (Gen. 3:15).

He destroyed the world of Noah's day with a flood, but He gave the promise of the rainbow. During the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites their murmuring may have brought upon them God's wrath, but the intercession of Moses spared the people from annihilation. Likewise, Miriam's leprosy was cured after seven days. Those bitten by the fiery serpents were healed by looking upon the brass serpent. The people repented after the rebellion of Korah. Although Israel did sin with the Midianite women, God rewarded the zeal of Phinehas and the people were spared. When the forty years of wandering was complete Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the promise land. Moses was able to see the promise land from Mt. Nebo before his death. A faithful remnant returned after seventy years of captivity. Jerusalem and the Temple was restored, but we now have the Kingdom of God. Though Ananias and Saphirra lied and died, many Christians feared God and many sinners were saved. After Elymas the Sorcerer was struck blind the proconsul believed. Did the Judge of all the earth do right?

Questions:

1. To what did Abraham appeal in his intercession with God over the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain?
2. How does the tree of life figure in the just wrath of God in Genesis and Revelation?
3. What did God do for Cain before he murdered his brother which shows God just nature?
4. Was God just in His dealings with man during the flood? Explain.
5. Explain how God showed His self just when he sent the plagues upon Egypt.
6. When Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu were killed by God, who did Moses say to his brother? Why did Aaron hold his peace at this explanation?
7. Why did only 3000 Israelites perish for worshipping the golden calf?
8. How did the Israelites provoke the wrath of God over His provisions?

9. Match the sin with the just punishment

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| _____ Miriam's prejudice | a. | Not permitted to enter Canaan |
| _____ Accepting spies evil report | b. | Ground swallowed up leaders |
| _____ Rebellion of Korah | c. | 24,000 died by plague |
| _____ Moses striking rock twice | d. | bitten by fiery serpents |
| _____ Calling manna worthless bread | e. | 40 years of wilderness wanderings |
| _____ Fornication with pagan women | f. | struck with leprosy |

10. Give illustrations from the New Testament showing God's just judgments against the wicked?

11. Match God's wrath with God's demonstration of mercy

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| _____ Adam and Eve punished | a. | Healed when looking to brass serpent |
| _____ The Flood | b. | Proconsul believed |
| _____ Miriam's leprosy | c. | Seed promise |
| _____ Fiery serpents | d. | Rainbow promise |
| _____ 70 years Captivity | e. | Healed in seven days |
| _____ Elymas blinded | f. | A remnant returned |

Application and Discussion:

1. How would you explain to those who are opposed to the ideal of the existence of Hell (eternal punishment) is compatible with a just God?
2. Give illustrations from life as to how God's mercy has been greater than his just wrath.

God is Trustworthy

A long planned vacation has to be canceled because of illness. The hot water heater goes out the very day company arrives to stay for the week. Your class notes are lost or stolen the day before a major exam. You tear your favorite dress on the way to church. It is true that such mundane events are only temporary. Life is filled with minor disappointments. All of us face adversity in diverse dangers and at different times, such as, divorce, disaster, depression, disappointment, disease, and death.

Elie Wiesel, was a Jew who survived the Holocaust, he said, "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the faces of the children whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever" (Lutzer Epilogue 1). Others were heard to cry out in the death camps: "Where is God?" Where is God when millions and millions of babies are being aborted? Where is God when injustices occur? Is there anyone out there listening? Does anyone care?

There is a book titled, "If God Loves Me, Why Can't I Get My Locker Open?" In other words, can God really be trusted? Can you trust Him even when things go unexpectedly wrong? Can you trust Him even when your situation is so discouraging that you see no way out? Will you be able to trust Him even when things seem hopeless? Does God still deserve your trust when life takes a turn for the worse?

Why is it so Hard to Trust God?

Perhaps the first question which needs to be answered is: Why is it so hard to trust God? Perhaps, there are many different reasons. We will consider some of the more prominent reasons.

First, we trust our perception. Like all humans, we have limited knowledge of the universe and limited experience. After surveying God's dealings with the Jews, Paul said, "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*" (Rom. 11:33). This limited perception leads to mis-conceptions. It is not possible for us to perceive what will happen tomorrow. "*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth*" (Prov. 27:1). A man's life is filled with problems and one day he will grow old (Eccl. 12:1). Then whether he is young or old, death can come suddenly and end this life (Heb. 9:27). Our perception of the right thing is not ways right, "*There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*" (Prov. 14:12). We do not always of a clear perception of what is best, but God does.

Second, we trust God's provisions. Like the children of Israel who put more trust in the things God provided for them in the wilderness wanderings than they did in their relationship with God, Himself. When they hungered in the wilderness, God fed them six days a week with manna from heaven for forty years. Why? So they could put their trust in food from Heaven or in the Father in Heaven who provided the food? "*That He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord*" (Deut. 8:3b). The proper response to God's provisions is not to trust in them but to give thanks to the Provider. Otherwise, the provisions of God are turned into an idol. When Israel sinned in the wilderness God sent fiery serpents to bite them. When they cried for relief, God had Moses prepare a brass serpent by which they could be saved by looking upon it. Later, King Hezekiah had to destroy this brass serpent because the people worshiped it instead of God. Adrian Rogers once said, "An idol is anything you love more, fear more, value more or serve more than you do Almighty God. Fill in the blank."

Furthermore, we trust in people. Trust does not come easy for most adults. Far too often we have put our trust in others and have been hurt and let down. Friends and family fail us. Brothers and

sisters in Christ betray us. Illogically, we blame God for these disappointing relationships and stop trusting in Him when in reality He did not let us down.

Another reason it is hard to trust God is because **we trust prosperity**. With wealth comes a sense of security. The more riches we have the less we depend on our relationship with God to see us through life. This is why it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:24). Although the motto: "In God We Trust" is found on our money, the truth is: "in gold we trust." Still many find it hard to trust in God when things are going badly for them financially, it is equally true that it is hard to trust in God when we have it so good that we believe that we have all we need.

Finally, we trust in our person. The old saying is "there are no atheists in foxholes." It is natural to trust in God and turn to Him when life is threatened or difficult. However, we often pride ourselves and congratulate ourselves by personally solving all our minor mishaps. When King Nebuchadnezzar beheld Babylon's greatness, he became arrogant and self-reliant. Instead he should have been thankful for all God had prospered him. His dream interpreted by Daniel in chapter two clearly demonstrated that God was behind all the good things in his life. God caused this ego-centric monarch to lose everything and become like a wild beast for a season until he overcame his self-admiration and could glorify God (Dan. 4:28-34).

On the other hand, there are those who realize that they cannot put their trust in themselves. They have tried and they have failed. These are often filled with regret and guilt. They wallow in self-pity and a sense of worthlessness. Such troubled souls must also come to realize that they were never intended to put their trust in themselves. Peter exhorts, "*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*" (1 Pet. 5:7).

It is hard for many to put their trust in God because they their own perception of life, the provisions of God for this life, in other people, in their prosperity, and even in their own person.

What Makes God Trustworthy?

People do not trust God because they put their trust in their perception, life's provisions, people, prosperity, and even their own person. Instead, they should trust in God. But what makes God so trustworthy?

People tend to trust someone they know. The better they know someone the more likely they will be convinced of their trustworthiness. Many do not trust in God, because they do not know Him. They envision God as a grumpy, old man who is mean-spirited and does not really care about them. Instead, they view the Heavenly Father as a kill-joy who only wants to make sure that no one is having any fun. To these, the name of God is synonymous with a tremendous ill-temper tyrant.

If they would only get to know the real nature and motives of God they would see His name stands for everything that is good and trustworthy. Consumers learn to trust certain "name-brand" products because they have used them and know they are trustworthy. God is indeed 100% perfect and worthy of our trust because of His great character.

God is Never Changing. He is immutable. God is changelessly faithful. God is never fickle. Without it He would not be God. For God to be unfaithful would be to act contrary to His nature. The pagan gods could not be trusted. They were capricious. However, "*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13).

God is All-Knowing. He knows what is best. He is to be trusted even when He does the opposite of what we want Him to do. When Job was confused by what was happening to him, God appeared to him in the whirlwind to ask him some difficult questions. Job could not answer even the questions about the simple creatures of the earth which he has observed in the wild. God asked him about...

- The lion (38:38-40)
- The ostrich (39:13-18)
- The hawk (39:26)
- The behemoth (40:13-19, 24)

- The leviathan (41:1-11)

Job realized that he isn't as smart as he thinks he is, that there are a lot of things in the universe and in his life that he doesn't understand. However, the Creator understands His creation. He can be trusted because He even made man. God never did explain why Job was suffering. Like Job, we need to mature to the point that we can say, "God I don't understand, but I trust You."

God is Perpetually Powerful. Of Him the psalmist wrote: *"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?"* (Ps. 56:3,4). *"God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble"* (Ps. 46:1). God the Son can even raise the dead. *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live"* (Jn. 11:25). He has overcome the world. *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* (Jn. 16:33). He works His great power in us. *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us"* (Eph. 3:20).

God is Totally Holy. Holy means being set apart from all that is wicked and evil. God is so holy that He cannot even be tempted to sin. Some people are not to be trusted, because they will lie to you. Some are untrustworthy, because they are so greedy that they will do anything to get ahead. Others are envious or filled with lust or hate. God is never sinful.

He is Loving. *"God is love"* (1 Jn. 4:8). It is very easy to trust someone who loves you. True love does is not jealous or selfish (1 Cor. 13:4f). To gain someone's trust requires to you show a genuine interest in their problems and their future well-being. *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (Jn. 3:16).

He is Always Sovereign. Nothing and no one rules over God. Nothing can overrule Him. He's the King of kings. He's the Lord of lords. God always fulfills His prophecies, brings His purposes to fruition, and keeps every promise. You can trust Him! Before Pilate, Jesus acknowledged God's sovereign control. *"Then Pilate said to Him, 'Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?' Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin'"* (Jn. 19:10,11). God can do anything He wants except sin, because He is holy and he does not have to answer to anyone. He is in control of over the level of temptation that a person has to endure. *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13).

God is trustworthy because of His perfect character. He is unchanging, knows everything, strong enough to do anything, totally holy, loving and always in control.

How Has, How Does, and How Has God Proven Himself To Be Trustworthy?

Punished for taking a righteous stand against Herod's sinful marriage, John the Baptist was thrown into prison. He began to have second thoughts as to whether or not Christ was the Messiah. For one thing, the Old Testament predicted that when the Messiah came, He would free the prisoners (Is. 61:1). He sent disciples to ask of Jesus, *"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"* (Matt. 11:3). Jesus told them to watch what He did and listen to what He said. Then they were to go back to John and report what they had seen. Jesus can be trusted as the Messiah and the Son of God because of what He had done, what He was doing, and what He will do. Likewise, God can be trusted because of what He has done for us in the past, what He is willing to do for us everyday, and what He has promised to do for us throughout eternity.

► **Loves Us**

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). Although we may not always understand the mind of God, verses like this one make it very clear that love is His motive. It is easy to trust someone if they

love you.

▶ **Near Us**

God will never forsake us or abandon us. *“Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’”* (Heb. 13:5). In this passage the Greek has five negatives: “I will not, not leave thee; neither will I not, not forsake thee” (Bridges 13.5). Although the pagan gods of Greece and Rome were distant and hard to find, God is not far from us. In his sermon on Mars’ Hill Paul told the Athenians concerning the Unknown God, *“so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us”* (Acts 17:27).

▶ **Cares for Us**

James Brown said, “There is no situation I can get into that God cannot get me out. Some years ago when I was learning to fly, my instructor told me to put the plane into a steep and extended dive. I was totally unprepared for what was about to happen. After a brief time the engine stalled, and the plane began to plunge out-of-control. It soon became evident that the instructor was not going to help me at all. After a few seconds, which seemed like eternity, my mind began to function again. I quickly corrected the situation. Immediately I turned to the instructor and began to vent my fearful frustrations on him. He very calmly said to me, ‘There is no position you can get this airplane into that I cannot get you out of. If you want to learn to fly, go up there and do it again.’”

Concerning their trust in God, Peter commanded the first century Christians that they should be *“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”* (1 Pet. 5:7). God’s care is not occasional or sporadic, instead it is constant. God’s care is comprehensive. Even the very hairs of our head are numbered (Mt. 10:30). Since we lose and gain hair every day the number of hairs upon our heads is constantly changing. Can you imagine any one caring so much about you that they would each day take notice of the number of hairs on your head. This does not mean He has little care for bald people. Still God is in complete control of the world around us. Nothing and no one can touch us without His allowance. Jesus said, *“...or your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him”* (Matt. 6:8). *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19). It should be easy to trust in a God who cares for us that much.

▶ **Promises Us**

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). God always keeps His promises. For many people promises are made to be broken. Even well meaning Christians will make promises they cannot keep or simply forget to fulfill them. Have you ever sincerely promised to pray for someone and then the next time you see them realize you have forgotten. God cannot lie. He cannot forget His promises. No one is as trustworthy with their word in all the universe. He has never once failed to keep His word. *“Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses”* (1 Kings 8:56).

▶ **Truthful To Us**

God is described by the psalmist as One *“who made heaven and earth, The sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever”* (Ps. 146:6). Truth and trust are closely related. If you cannot trust someone to tell you the truth you cannot put your faith in them at all. Their word is not worthy of your trust. God’s Word is always true. He will not change His word on us in the end (Matt. 16:16; Rev. 2:10; Rev. 21:8). The gods created from the minds of men often say one thing and do another. Whereas God must tell the truth, because He cannot lie. Allah of Islam can chose to change his mind and be capricious about his promises. A Muslim cannot say with any certainty that they will go to paradise. They can only claim: “If Allah wills.” On the day of judgment for the Muslim, Allah could chose to send everyone to hell regardless of how faithful they were in their prayers, pilgrimages, and fastings.

▶ **Hears Us**

Do you believe: “Whatever you ask in prayer you will receive”? Or how about, “Ask and it will be given to you”? Or maybe, “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective”? God has promised us time and again to hear our prayers. Prayer is not an empty performance of piety. Prayer is powerful

in procuring God's promises. In faith we trust God hears our prayers even when we cannot hear His answer. At the end of World War 2, Allied Forces searched farms and houses and in the basement of one was scratched the message:

I believe in the Sun – Even when it does not shine.
I believe in Love – Even when it is not shown.
I believe in God – even when He does not speak.

► **Saves Us**

While peering over a cliff a man lost his footing and fell. Fortunately, he was able to grab onto a some tree, arresting his descent. As his arms began to weaken he cried out for help. "Is there anybody up there who can save me?" A voice thundered from a cloud above him: "Let go of the tree!" "Is that you God?" he asked. "Yes," God answered. "If you want to be saved you must first let go of the tree." The man thought for a moment and then yelled, "Is there anybody else up there?" The man in the story above should have trusted God to save him. When the strength in his arms gave out and he lost his grip on the tree he fell - just three feet. The fact is God knew there was a ledge just below him. The man could not see it. So instead of trusting God to save him he clung to the tree and looked for someone else to rescue him. He suffered hopelessly, because he failed to trust God.

Although man cannot save himself, God can be trusted to save us. *"For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day"* (2 Tim. 1:12). *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9).

► **Disciplines Us**

God is faithful in disciplining His children. *"I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me"* (Ps. 119:75). Instead of complaining about how mean and overbearing God is in your life, own up to the fact that you not only deserve His correction - you need it. Although some parents discipline without compassion, Jeremiah explained the God does not. *"Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men"* (Lam. 3:32,33). In fact, God's discipline is proof of His love (Heb. 12:5f). The Heavenly Father is a trustworthy parent in that He cares enough to correct His children.

► **Judges Us**

Atheists are known to lament the idea that wicked mass murderers like Hitler will not face judgement for their crimes. For those who do not believe in God there is no hope of a final day of Judgment where men will experience the ultimate justice.

In his Revelation John *"heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her'"* (Rev. 19:1,2).

On the other hand, the righteous look forward to the day of Judgment where they will be rewarded for their faithfulness to God. Who would we rather trust?

God can be trusted because of who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. If we are lost throughout eternity, it will be because we have failed to trust in Him and not because He is not trustworthy.

Questions:

1. Why does mankind have a limited perception and knowledge? What can be done about this?

2. Give two illustrations of how Israel put their trust in the things provided from them instead of putting their trust in the Divine Provider?

3. Give some examples from the Scriptures or from life where men have lost trust in God because they were putting their trust in some person.

4. Why do riches often result in a lack of reliance and trust in God?

5. Why did God remove Nebuchadnezzar from his throne for a season?

6. Do those who are not self-reliant, but have self-pity and no trust in themselves the ones who will always put their trust in God? Explain.

7. How does one's view or understand of the nature of God result in a lack of trust in Him? What can be done about this?

8. Matching:

_____ God is Immutable	a.	God always can be trusted to know what is best for us.
_____ God is Omniscient	b.	God is always in control.
_____ God is Omnipotent	c.	God will never do any wrong to you.
_____ God is Perfectly Pure	d.	God is always faithful
_____ God is Love	e.	God is bigger than any the troubles we will face in life.
_____ God is Lord of lords	f.	God will always do the best thing for you.

9. How did John the Baptist know that Jesus was the Messiah?

10. What is God's main motive behind His dealings with man?

11. How does the nearness of God relate to His trustworthiness?

12. How has God demonstrated His great care for us?
13. T F God has and will always keep His promises.
14. How are truth and trust related to each other?
15. How do the chastisements from God show His trustworthiness?

Application and Discussion:

1. When are you most likely to have a lack of trust in God? What might be done about this?
2. Do you ever fail to pray about every care because you lack trust in God to hear and answer?