

What We Believe...About God Deuteronomy 6:4-9

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We've spent the last three weeks talking about what we believe about the Bible. I've devoted that much time to Scripture because it's through Scripture that God has most clearly revealed Himself and His plan for our salvation to us. Romans 1:19,20 tells us that an awareness of God can be had from nature, "[19] since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. [20] For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Still, it's only the *Bible* as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit that tells us our condition as sinners and how we can be saved from eternal punishment through faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

We could spend a similar three weeks talking about today's topic – God. In fact, in seminary I had a whole course just on "The Doctrine of God". But if we're to finish this series on the foundational beliefs of our faith in our lifetimes we can't spend weeks on each subject, so we'll simply try to hit the "highlights" of each topic as we go.

As for what we believe about God, if you don't own it already let me encourage you to obtain a copy of the book *Knowing God*, by J.I. Packer. Written in 1973, it's a modern classic I think every Christian ought to be required to read. It'll be the best \$10 you've ever spent and will open your eyes to things about God you never even considered and almost certainly will lead you closer to Him.

That said, where do we begin talking about God? Well, one of the clearest declarations about Him in Scripture is that there is only one, true God. The 10 Commandments begin "You shall have no other gods before me." (Deut. 5:7) This doesn't mean that there are other "gods" and we should just be careful to honor the God of the Bible over them. The context in Deuteronomy tells us plainly that there is no other, true deity besides the God of Scripture. Dt. 4:39 "Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. *There is no other.*" This is why the worship of idols makes God so angry, because it is the worship of nothing over Him. Dt. 32:31 "They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols."

People down through the ages have worshipped multiple so-called gods. Sometimes these "gods" would be in charge of geographic regions or of nations, sometimes they would specialize in war or fertility, and so on. But the Hebrew people were called on to recognize the biblical God alone and Dt. 6:4, the great statement about God that Jesus Himself quoted in Matt. 12:29 and something Jews still repeat in their morning and evening prayers, says "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, *the LORD is one.*" And so the Apostle Paul said in I Cor. 8:4-6, "(4) ...We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. (5) For even if there are so-

called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), (6) yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”

Of course, that quote from Paul brings up something confusing. Orthodox Christians have always maintained that though there is one God, He manifests Himself in three persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – a concept we call *the Trinity*. So which is it, is there one God or three?

As it's classically stated, “there are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” In other words, the Trinity is three separate persons but one essence. We see them mentioned together in verses such as Matt. 28:19, among others, “Therefore go and make disciples all nations, baptizing them in the name of *the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*.” And the Son, Jesus, is recognized as divine in John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word [later identified in v.14 the One who came in the flesh, that is, Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the *Word was God*”. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is recognized as God in Acts 5:3,4 where the Apostle Peter says that a man named Ananias lied to God when he lied to the Holy Spirit about a transaction he'd made.

Each person of the Trinity plays a unique role in our salvation. God the Father *planned* it, God the Son, Jesus, *accomplished* it by His perfect life and sacrificial death, and God the Holy Spirit *applies* it to us by opening our eyes to see our need of a Savior and giving us faith.

Now, why do I spend time that many of us may take for granted – that there's only one true God? Well, it's because time after time, even the ancient Hebrews would be led astray into worshiping false gods. And lest we think that it was only them, even in our day people worship false idols – not ones made of stone or wood but false idols nonetheless. So often people put money, or the earth, or the stars, or hobbies, or family, or jobs, or relationships, or homes, or sports, or activities of all sorts before God. And repeatedly God tells us He is a jealous God, He doesn't want to compete with anyone or anything for first place in our life. He wants our sole and exclusive devotion to be for Him and Him alone. So just as the Jews repeat “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” each day, maybe it would be good for us to ask ourselves daily, “Is the Lord my God *really* the only god I'm going to give first place in my heart?”

What is this one, true God like? Sometimes people speak of the three “omni's”: God is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), and omnipresent (present in all places). Theologians have often referred to God's *incommunicable attributes*, things that characterize only Him, such as: self-existence (He was not caused), immutability (He doesn't change), infinity (He has no limit in time or space), oneness, etc. and God's *communicable attributes*, things that are present perfectly in God and imperfectly in us, such as: wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, etc. What they are saying is

that God is both transcendent (far above us) as well as immanent (He's near to us, He created us in His image, and we can know Him).

Perhaps it's more helpful to think of some defining statements Scripture makes about God. We're told that He's the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1), that He is Spirit and so can be everywhere (John 4:24), that He is sovereign and rules over everything (Psalm 103:19), that He is holy (I Peter 1:15), that He is just (Psalm 111:7), that He is good (Psalm 106:1) and that He is love (I John 4:8).

The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it so beautifully when it says "There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions [isn't controlled by changeable emotions]; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and [nevertheless], most just, and terrible [severe] in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."

Now all these attributes are so many that they're hard to take in, aren't they? But as we think about the uniqueness of God, the greatness of God, the perfection of God, the power of God, etc. a picture begins to emerge. It's not the typical picture of God held by many in a cultural – a picture of a God too weak to do anything but stand on the sidelines and cheer us on in life, a God who exists to grant our wishes like some genie in a bottle. Nor is He a deity who acts on a whim, one day blessing us and the next bringing tragedy or punishing us or denying us pleasures.

Instead, what we find in Scripture is the one, true God who created and is completely in control of all things, who is far above us and yet knows us intimately (Psalm 139). He knows that we're frail in every way and yet He shows us compassion (Psalm 103:12,13) and promises to uphold us (Psalm 145:14 "The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down").

Not only that, this infinitely holy and just God who cannot stand sin and will surely see to it that no act of evil will go unpunished (Nahum 1:2,3), nevertheless He offers the grace and mercy of His salvation to us at the cost of His own Son's life (Rom. 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And even beyond that, He promises that He won't leave the security of our salvation up to our weak, wavering faithfulness. Instead, He promises that by the might of His sovereign power we will stand one day in heaven with Him (Jude 24,25 "[24] To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—[25] to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen").

Many today, just as in the past, have mistaken God's patience for impotence. II Peter 3:9,10, however, tells us "[9] The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." So, as the Apostle Peter says just a few verses later, "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him". And we do that by placing our faith in Christ as our Savior.

Our glorious God is so worthy of our love, our worship, our thanks, and our obedience. Draw your picture of Him from Scripture and not from what the world says or even what your mind imagines. As you read the Bible and see it's description of God, stop a moment at each quality – wise, holy, powerful, just, compassionate, etc. – and think how that quality enriches your life. Then praise Him for it, for He is surely worthy.