

Who is God?

Lesson #1 – *The Source of Knowledge & the Trinity*

Lesson Objectives

- Explain the sources from which we derive a true knowledge of God.
- Describe the essential concepts of the Trinity.
- Identify the misconceptions of God prevalent in our culture.

Lesson

1. The Sources of Knowledge

- In order to understand who God is, we must examine the sources of knowledge available to us that reveal Him. There are *three* primary sources of knowledge, along with a *fourth* secondary source that we will consider in this lesson. The primary sources for the knowledge God are (1) the *Scriptures*, (2) the *Spirit*, and (3) an *Experience* whereby we come to personally know Him. The secondary source we will examine in this lesson is *nature* (i.e. creation). Anywhere that an incorrect knowledge of God exists, it will be traceable to a misunderstanding of, or absence of, one of these sources.
 - **Primary Sources** of knowledge are things that deal *directly* with the subject being studied. They would be sources of information *about the subject itself*.
 - **Secondary Sources** of knowledge are things that deal *indirectly* with the subject being studied. They would be sources of information that *relate* to the subject being studied, but are not directly *about* the subject.
 - With this distinction made between primary and secondary sources, it will be shown why Nature should be considered as a secondary source for the study of God.

1.1. Nature's Witness to God

- A rational man, when considering the vastness and complexities of the creation will generally come to the logical conclusion that there must be "*a creator*". Often, they will identify that creator as God. The scriptures even state that nature itself testifies of Him. As such, nature is a source for the knowledge of God. However, we must be careful that we do not consider the belief that there must be "*a God*" equal to the understanding of "*who God is*".
 - Men in every age, culture, and nation have looked at nature and served gods which are nothing more than creations of the imaginations of their own minds and hearts. Paul refers to this in Romans 1:25 when he says that men have "*...worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator...*".
- While we can see, hear, and touch *evidences* of Him in the natural world, we do not base our knowledge of God merely on physical evidences that are observable through our natural senses.

Science does not *disprove* the existence of God, but at the same time it is *insufficient on its own* to arrive at a full and complete knowledge of Him. The writer of Hebrews alludes to this in Hebrews 11:3, as does Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Heb 11:3 (KJV)

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

1Cor 2:14 (KJV)

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

- From the above scriptures, we understand that we cannot simply study the rocks and stars (the “*..things which are seen...*”) and determine where they came from. Likewise, we cannot simply study man and understand where he came from. If we cannot determine the origins of the world by studying the *things* in the world, then we must concede that the natural things of the world will also be insufficient to provide us with a proper knowledge of God. We also see that the natural man is incapable of receiving the things of God because they are spiritually discerned. Therefore, in order to fully know God, it’s needful to go beyond the secondary source of Nature, and consider the primary sources of the scriptures, the Spirit, and personal experience.

1.2. The Scriptures

- As Baptists, we believe that the scriptures are the supreme standard of truth. The scriptures are authoritative for all things with regard to what we believe. This holds true for our knowledge of God Himself. God has chosen to reveal Himself through His word. In so doing, He has made it possible for man to know Him.
- While nature reveals the *existence* of God, the scriptures reveal the *nature* of God. Through an investigation of scripture, we are able to arrive at an accurate answer to the question of our study. That God has revealed Himself to us through His word is a demonstration of His mercy and grace. Had He not chosen to provide us with a source of truth regarding Himself, man would be hopelessly and forever lost.
- The scriptures not only make known to us the characteristics and attributes of God, but they tell us what His will is for man. We have not been left to wonder and guess at what God requires of man. From the scriptures, we are able to come to the knowledge of what God wants from man, and for man.

2Tim 3:15 (KJV)

3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

1.3. The Spirit

- We have stated to this point that the scriptures are the supreme standard of our knowledge of God. While this is true, there is a related primary source of the knowledge of God that must be considered. That source is God Himself, specifically the *Spirit of God*.
 - Because man is a fallen creature, left on his own, he will more often than not arrive at incorrect conclusions regarding what the scriptures teach. The evidence of this fact is clearly seen in the varied opinions regarding the characteristics and attributes of God among men, that all claim to have derived their knowledge from the Bible. J.M. Pendleton wrote the following in his work *“Church Manual Designed for the use of Baptist Churches”* - (1867)

“As there is such diversity of opinion the religious world, it is eminently proper for those who appeal to the Scriptures as the fountain of truth to declare what they believe the Scriptures to teach. To say that they believe the Scriptures is to say nothing to the purpose. All will say this, and yet all differ as to the teachings of the Bible. There must be some distinctive declaration. What a man believes the Bible to teach is his Creed, either written or unwritten. The Lord referred to the Spirit’s work to bring us to a mature knowledge of the truth in John 16:13.”

John 16:13 (KJV)

16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

- Without the help of the Spirit, man is unable to fully comprehend the truth found in scripture. The scripture itself testifies of this fact as well in 2 Peter 1:20.

2Pet 1:20 (KJV)

1:20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

- Though man has often claimed a right to interpret the scripture as *“he sees and understands it”*, we must remember that the scriptures are not subject to our own *“private interpretation”*. Our understanding of the Word of God must be enlightened by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds.
- The Spirit of God causes the words of scripture to come off the page, lodge into our hearts, and ultimately change our lives. A study of the scriptures that is absent of the Spirit of God will turn into nothing more than a cold, lifeless, academic exercise. Countless professed Christians have an academic understanding of the scriptures, but their understanding has never been enlightened by the working of the Holy Spirit. To these people, Bible study is a dull and often tedious exercise. To the Christian well acquainted with the Spirit’s enlightenment in Bible study,

it is a time of great joy and satisfaction. In the search to know God, the Spirit is a primary source that must be present. Without Him, our understanding will remain clouded by our fallen nature. Without the Spirit, we can learn some things *about* God, but we can never come to *know* Him.

- The Bible speaks of many who had an intellectual knowledge of God, but fell short of coming to know Him. From Nicodemus to the scribes and Pharisees, we find people who knew there was a God, and knew something of what the scriptures revealed about Him, yet never came to a personal knowledge of Him through the working of the Spirit of God. The following verses highlight these thoughts from the Lords conversation with Nicodemus.

John 3:3 (KJV)

3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:5-6 (KJV)

3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

1.4. Personal Experience

- The final primary source of the knowledge of God is a personal experience whereby we come to know God as individuals. This third source is the direct result of the working of the Holy Spirit within us. Until we have an experience with God in salvation, our knowledge of God will remain at best an intellectual knowledge of Him. We will be little better than the man who derives all of his knowledge of God from nature. We might know a little more about Him than the man who attempts to understand Him from nature, but we will still not know Him. In some ways, relying on an intellectual understanding of God through an academic search of the scripture can bring us into the real danger of being “religiously lost”. We begin to believe that knowing *about* God is the same as *knowing* God.
- When Jesus was speaking to Peter in Matthew 16, we gain insight into the need for this firsthand, personal experience in order to truly know God.

Matt 16:13-17 (KJV)

16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

16:14 And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

- We also see the need to “*know*” God in Matthew 7. There is perhaps no more sobering or clear teaching in the entire Bible regarding the need to personally know God than the following verses found in Matthew 7.

Matt 7:21-23 (KJV)

7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

- The Lord proclaims here that there will be *many* who will go through this life doing many good works in the *name* of the Lord. However, it is clearly seen that doing good works in the *name of the Lord*, is not the same thing as actually *knowing Him and who He is*.

2. The Trinity

2.1. The Unity of God in Three Persons

- Before proceeding to the next three lessons, a framework regarding the Trinity is needful. The Bible teaches that God is a Trinity of three distinct, yet unified persons; the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. While our fallen minds have difficulty fully comprehending the doctrine of the Trinity, the scriptures clearly reveal God as one, in three persons.
- The Hebrew word “**Elohim**” is found 2,600 times in the Old Testament and is translated to the English word “God” in the Old Testament the vast majority of those 2,600 times. The word, “Elohim” is plural. Because the scriptures clearly teach that there is “one” God, we find that the trinity is “one”, yet in “Elohim”, we have the idea of more than one. The apparent contradiction of using a plural word to describe a singular God is solved when we realize that the one true God consists of three distinct persons.
- Several verses upon which an understanding of the existence of the Trinity are shown below.

Gen 1:26 (KJV)

1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Matt 3:16-17 (KJV)

3:16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Gal 4:4-6 (KJV)

4:4 But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

- These are but three of many places where the doctrine of the Trinity is identified in the scripture. The remaining lessons will focus on each member of the Trinity. As we study them individually and learn about the characteristics that distinguish them as individual persons, we must always remember that they are ultimately *one*. There is no divide or competition between them. What one person of the Trinity desires, the other two desire as well. What one person of the Trinity hates, the other two hate as well. What one thinks, the others think. What one feels, the others feel.
- Yet in this oneness, there are distinctions. These distinctions will be discussed in the remaining lessons.

3. False Concepts of God in our Culture

3.1. Pagan

- Before concluding this first lesson, some thoughts regarding the culture's great misunderstanding (and religion's great misrepresentation) of God ought to be pointed out.
- One of our cultures greatest sins is our attempt to define God by the standard of man. In turn, we fail to define man by the standard of God. The result is that God becomes nothing more than the thoughts and imaginations of man's corrupt heart and mind. By failing to understand God's holiness and man's corruption, man will claim that all will go to Heaven because (as they see it) God would never send anyone to Hell. In the never ending attempt to exalt man, it becomes necessary to reduce God. To most in our culture, God is the servant of man rather than man the servant of God. The creation has been made out to be about man rather than God. As in the days when science believed the sun, moon, and stars all rotated around the earth, many today believe God revolves around them. However, when the light of the truth is revealed, we see that we revolve around Him. When life is properly understood we see the truth of Solomon's words that man is to "*fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*" In the King James Version of the Bible, the word "duty" is italicized. Italicized words were not in the original manuscripts but were added for readability and clarification. While the addition of the word "duty" is not necessarily misleading, the verse reads as it was ultimately written without it. Fearing God and keeping his commandments isn't merely everything we are supposed to **do**, but it is literally everything we are supposed to **be**. It is indeed the "*whole of man*".
- When a people fail to know who God is, or choose to live without a continual appreciation for who He is, sin will inevitably follow. When a nation forgets God, that nation will soon be forgotten. When we forget Him, we will soon forget everything we are supposed to be, and will ultimately lead lives of emptiness. May God help us to restore a right fear, reverence, and love for who He is, not merely who we want Him to be.

Conclusion

- An accurate, and personal understanding of God is essential to understanding life.
- To know God, we must base our knowledge of Him on His Word, be led to Him by His Spirit, and come to know Him through a personal experience of regeneration.
 - If one of the three primary sources of the knowledge of God is missing, our knowledge of Him will remain incomplete.