

BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT GOD THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson 1: The One True God

Biblical doctrine is the study of what the Bible teaches about God and other important truths. The first year of Adventure Club covers biblical truth about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Below is an excerpt from *What We Teach: Doctrinal Statement of Liberty Baptist Church*.

We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Timothy 2:5), an infinite, all-knowing, self-existent Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)—each equally deserving worship and obedience.

We teach that God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31). As the only absolute and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As creator He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17).

We teach that God the Father has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4-6). We teach that God the Father is sovereign in salvation, and we teach that all people are responsible to repent and believe the Gospel for salvation. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation are both clearly taught in Scripture. God becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5-9).

MAIN TRUTH, CENTRAL SCRIPTURE, AND OUTLINE

The LORD, the God of the Bible, is the one true God. (1 Kings 18:20-39)

1. God demands exclusive obedience (1 Kgs. 18:20-24)
 - A. A correct response to God – repentance, worship, and obedience
 - B. Elijah’s call to respond to God – a contest to prove Yahweh is the one true God
2. God declares His exclusive nature (1 Kgs. 18:25-39)
 - A. Baal’s inability to send fire
 - B. Yahweh’s authority and ability to send fire

Key verses: 1 Kings 18:21, 37-39

MEMORY VERSES

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ⁴ *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:* ⁵ *And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

Isaiah 45:5-6 ⁵ *I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:* ⁶ *That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.*

Isaiah 45:18 *For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.*

ADDITIONAL NOTES

These notes are from *The Holy One: A Handbook of Biblical Truth about God*, a book being written by Pastor Stan. Hopefully the time of publication will be in the next few months, so your prayers are much appreciated.

God. How much this title implies no tongue, human or angelic, can express. It is a volume of an infinite number of leaves and every leaf full of meaning. It will be read by saints and angels, through the ages of eternity, but they will never reach the last leaf, nor fully comprehend the meaning of a single page.

EDWARD PAYSON (1783-1827)

Beware of manufacturing a God of your own; a God who is all mercy, but not just...Such a God is an idol of your own.

J. C. RYLE (1816-1900)

In this chapter we will seek to answer these pertinent questions: Is there only one God or many gods? Why are so many different gods worshiped in the world? Since there is only one true God, does He condone or approve those who deny or doubt His existence or worship other gods? We will begin by examining some false views of God.

FALSE VIEWS OF GOD

1. The false view of *atheism*

Atheism is the belief that there is no God (Ps. 14:1). This view is logically absurd because an atheist would have to know everything and be everywhere in the universe to conclude that no God exists. *Dogmatic atheism* is the position of all who openly reject the existence of God. *Practical atheism* is the position of those who mentally agree that there is a God, but live as if there is none. Atheism is both unreasonable and arrogant. Beeke and Smalley write: "Just as the fear of God in the heart is the fountain of righteousness, so the denial of God in the heart is the fountain of sin." They further add, "Atheism, whether publicly denying God or living as if he did not exist, arises not from a lack of evidence or intellectual persuasion, but from the inner

darkness of man in rebellion against God. Atheists may produce a variety of sinful fruits, but the poisonous root of all is pride” (*Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1:507-508).

2. The false view of *agnosticism*

Agnosticism (from Greek prefix, *a-*, no + *gnosis*, knowledge) is the view that a person cannot know if God exists because all knowledge must be scientifically verified and this is impossible with respect to God. The agnostic neither denies nor affirms the existence of God, but simply says, “We cannot know if God does or does not exist.” It is willful ignorance. It is interesting to note that the Latin verb translated “we do not know” is *ignoramus*. Beeke and Smalley observe: “Certainly, if theology were man’s quest to discover God, it could never break free from agnosticism. However, Christian theology arises from God’s pursuit of man” (*Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1:504).

3. The false view of *polytheism*

Polytheism is the belief in many gods (from Greek, *poly*, many + *theos*, god). The Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans were polytheists. They made gods of all created things, of birds, fish, and animals. They worshiped the sun, moon, and planets. They also made gods to represent virtues and vices. Modern examples of this view are nature religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Mormonism.

4. The false view of *pantheism*

Pantheism (from Greek, *pan*, all + *theos*, god) holds that God is all and all is God. It regards all finite things as merely aspects or parts of the one eternal self-existent being. Pantheists believe there is no God apart from the material universe and everything in the universe reveals or manifests God.

5. The false view of *dualism*

Dualism is the view that two distinct principles or forces of eternal and equal power are in conflict. In ethics, these opposing forces are known as good and evil; in religion, God and Satan; in nature, light and darkness.

6. The false view of *deism*

Deism holds that God set the various laws of nature in motion at the time of creation and then withdrew Himself, leaving the universe to run by these laws. Deism presents an absentee god who has little or nothing to do with his creation. Deists deny God’s intervention through providence and miracles.

HOW THE ONE TRUE GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

The Bible begins by stating the existence of one true God (Gen. 1:1). This is a truth revealed by God Himself in Scripture. Man must either accept this truth by faith or reject it (Heb. 11:6). Belief in the existence of God is foundational to an understanding of everything else in the

Bible. If a person rejects the fact of God's existence he has no reference point for understanding himself or the world around him. The knowledge of God is both possible and desirable. God has revealed the truth about Himself in two ways: general revelation and special revelation. Berkhof writes: "The Bible testifies to a twofold revelation of God: a revelation in nature round about us, in human consciousness, and in the providential government of the world; and revelation embodied in the Bible as the Word of God" (*Systematic Theology*, 21). Wayne Grudem draws this conclusion: "Thus, for those who are correctly evaluating the evidence, *everything* in Scripture and *everything* in nature proves clearly that God exists and that he is the powerful and wise Creator that Scripture describes him to be. Therefore, when we believe that God exists, we are basing our belief *not* on some blind hope apart from any evidence, but on *an overwhelming amount of reliable evidence from God's words and God's works*" (*Systematic Theology*, 143).

Grudem rightly adds, "If we are to know God at all, it is necessary that he reveal himself to us.... The necessity for God to reveal himself to us also is seen in the fact that sinful people misinterpret the revelation about God found in nature.... Therefore, we need Scripture if we are to interpret natural revelation rightly. Hundreds of false religions in the world are evidence of the way sinful people, without guidance from Scripture, will always misunderstand and distort the revelation about God found in nature. But the Bible alone tells us how to understand the testimony about God from nature. Therefore we depend on God's active communication to us in Scripture for our true knowledge of God" (*Systematic Theology*, 149).

1. General revelation of God in the physical universe

General revelation is truth about God that is revealed to all people everywhere, hence it is called "general." This truth is available through physical observation and is both clear and convincing. John Gill recognizes the powerful testimony of general revelation: "There is nothing in the whole creation the mind can contemplate, the eye can look upon, or the hand can lay hold on, but what proclaims the Being of God" (*A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 5). All people are thus accountable for what they know or could know about the one true God.

Psalms 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork.*

Romans 1:20 *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.*

Wayne Grudem comments: "This broad reference to 'the things that have been made' suggests that in some sense every created thing gives evidence of God's character. Nevertheless, it is man himself, created in the image of God, who most abundantly bears witness to the existence of God: whenever we meet another human being, we should (if our minds are thinking correctly) realize that such an incredibly intricate, skillful, communicative living creature could only have been created by an infinite, all-wise Creator.... For those who have eyes to see and evaluate the evidence correctly, every leaf on every tree, every blade of grass, every star in the sky, and every other part of creation all cry out continuously, 'God made me! God made me! God made me!' If our hearts and minds were not so blinded by sin, it would be impossible for us to look closely at a leaf from any tree and say, 'No one created this: it just happened.' The beauty of a snowflake, the majestic power of a thunderstorm, the skill of a honeybee, the

refreshing taste of cold water, the incredible abilities of the human hand—all these and thousands of other aspects of creation simply could not have come into existence apart from the activity of an all-powerful and all-wise Creator” (*Systematic Theology*, 142-143). In a similar vein, Lewis Chafer notes that both general revelation in nature and special revelation in Scripture are both valuable: “The book of nature is as much God’s book as is the Book of revelation. The universe is His work and therefore must attest His Being, and, as far as it can advance, unfold His ways. The voice of nature and the voice of revelation proceeding from the same source must harmonize; nor can either be slighted with impunity” (*Systematic Theology*, 1:140).

2. Special revelation of God in Scripture and Christ

2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

Matthew 16:16-17 ¹⁶ *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* 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.*

Special revelation is truth about God that is revealed to some people, but not to everyone, hence it is called “special.” This truth is understood only by the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit. In addition to the work of inspiration and illumination there is the necessary work of regeneration and faith in Christ, as Steven Lawson states: “When we come to God by faith in Christ, we enter into the personal knowledge of the Father. Jesus says, ‘This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’ (John 17:3). Christianity, unlike other religions, is not concerned with external matters of outward rituals and superficial routines. Instead, it is rooted in a living relationship with God in the heart. To know God is to enjoy the experiential knowledge of Him in the depth of the soul. This means we may no longer merely know *about* Him, but actually know Him. It is to love Him as you would another person. The only difference is that this relationship is much closer and far more intimate, because the Spirit of God dwells inside of us who believe” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 258-259).

There is another important consideration in knowing God. General or natural revelation must not be considered trustworthy apart from the Bible because God’s special revelation in Scripture shows that, left to man’s own thinking, he will corrupt the revelation of God in nature. John Calvin (1509-1564) compared Scripture to a “spectacle” or looking-glass that is necessary for a clear understanding of God: “Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacle will begin to read distinctively; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.1).

Louis Berkhof offers these helpful thoughts about the necessity of special revelation in addition to natural revelation: “As a result of the entrance of sin into the world, the handwriting of God in nature is greatly obscured, and is in some of the most important matters rather dim and illegible. Moreover, man is stricken with spiritual blindness, and is thus deprived of the ability to

read aright what God had originally plainly written in the works of creation. In order to remedy the matter and to prevent the frustration of His purpose, God did two things. In His supernatural revelation He republished the truths of natural revelation, cleared them of misconception, interpreted them with a view to the present needs of man and thus incorporated them in His supernatural revelation of redemption. And in addition to that He provided a cure for the spiritual blindness of man in the work of regeneration and sanctification, including spiritual illumination, and thus enabled man once more to obtain true knowledge of God, the knowledge that carries with it the assurance of eternal life” (*Systematic Theology*, 23-24).

BIBLICAL REVELATION OF THE ONE TRUE GOD

The clear testimony of Scripture reveals the existence of only one true God. Lawson writes: “The most fundamental teaching of the Scripture is this cornerstone truth, that there is only one God” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 31). All other gods are false gods that do not actually exist. Beeke and Smalley state: “The one true God is distinguished from all others by his glorious nature and his Trinitarian personality as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (*Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1:502). Consider the teaching of both Old and New Testaments:

Deuteronomy 4:35 *Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him.*

Deuteronomy 6:4 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.*

1 Kings 8:23 *And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart.*

1 Chronicles 17:20 *O LORD, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.*

Psalms 18:31 *For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God?*

Psalms 86:10 *For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.*

Isaiah 40:18 *To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?*

Isaiah 43:10 *Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.*

Isaiah 44:6-8 ⁶ *Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. ⁷ And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them. ⁸ Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.*

Isaiah 45:5-6 ⁵ *I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: ⁶ That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.*

Isaiah 45:18 *For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.*

Isaiah 45:22 *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

Isaiah 46:9-10 ⁹ Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

Mark 12:29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6 ⁴ As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. ⁵ For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) ⁶ But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

Ephesians 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

MAN'S REJECTION OF THE ONE TRUE GOD

This world has largely rejected God's general and special revelation of Himself. In addition, the world has not only rejected the one true God, but it has replaced Him with other false gods. These false gods may be physical representations or mental concepts, as noted by A. W. Pink: "The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form 'gods' out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a 'god' out of their own carnal mind" (*Attributes of God*, 21). False gods (idols) are vain and empty (Deut. 32:21; 1 Kg. 16:13; Ps. 31:6; 96:5; Isa. 41:29; 44:9-20; Jer. 2:5, 11; 10:14-15; 14:22; 16:19; 18:15; 51:17-18; Dan. 5:23; Jon. 2:8; Hab. 2:18-20). Lawson states: "Any other so-called god is simply the result of the vain thoughts of darkened minds. Any other deity has no basis in reality whatsoever" (*Show Me Your Glory*, 38). Cited below are the downward steps of humanity from original, clear knowledge of the one true God to the widespread acceptance and worship of many false gods.

1. God has revealed Himself to mankind since creation (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:18:23).

All unbelief and rejection of God is therefore inexcusable (Acts 14:15-17; 17:16-30; Rom. 1:20).

2. This truth about the one true God was known from creation until the days of Noah.

Genesis 9:18-19 ¹⁸ And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.

3. The world population was scattered at the Tower of Babel.

Apparently this was the approximate time when mankind first invented and worshiped false gods. John MacArthur comments: "The original city of Babylon was the birthplace of idolatry where the residents built the Tower of Babel, a monument to rebelliousness and false religion. Such idolatry was subsequently spread when God confounded man's language and scattered the around the world" (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, note on Revelation 14:8).

Genesis 11:8-9 ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. ⁹ Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

4. In Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) Abraham's family worshiped false gods.

Genesis 12:1-3 ¹ Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: ² And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: ³ And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Joshua 24:2 And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods.

5. While in Egypt and Canaan God's chosen people lived in the midst of false gods and idolatry.

The ten plagues were God's judgments on the false gods of Egypt. Canaan was occupied by people who served many false gods. For centuries God's people existed as an island in a sea of idolatry. They were uniquely chosen to serve, worship, and represent Yahweh, the one true God.

Exodus 20:1-4 ¹ And God spake all these words, saying, ² I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ³ Thou shalt have no other gods before me. ⁴ Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Deuteronomy 4:35 Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him.

1 Chronicles 17:20-22 ²⁰ O LORD, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. ²¹ And what one nation in the earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people, whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt?

²² For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, LORD, becamest their God.

WHY PEOPLE REJECT THE ONE TRUE GOD

1. People desire to have a god(s) they can see. False gods are usually represented and worshiped in visible and/or tangible ways.

2. People desire to have a god(s) they can use for their benefit. False gods are often appeased and manipulated for pragmatic purposes. John Snyder observes: "It is curious to note that all through the Bible, especially visible in the Old Testament, people made idols according to their

cultural surroundings. When the Jews chose to worship idols, they did not make Chinese gods nor American Indian gods. They made gods like those of the surrounding culture. They simply adjusted the True God to fit their way of thinking and living” (*Behold Your God: Rethinking God Biblically*, 32).

3. People desire to have a god(s) they can feel comfortable with. False gods are neither transcendent nor holy, but rather they are limited and flawed.

Over time the truth of God’s special creation (Gen. 1-2) was replaced with various legends and myths. The truth of God’s holiness and grace was replaced by a system of man-made gods and religious rituals. People arrogantly replaced the one true God with self-made counterfeits. As someone expressed it, “In the beginning God created man in His own image, and ever since man has returned the favor.”

Psalms 50:21 *These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*

The present world is filled with false gods and false religion. All who serve false gods and believe in false religion are without excuse. The one true God has revealed the truth about Himself and His plan of redemption for all men. It is our responsibility to believe, obey, and proclaim this truth to all men everywhere. John Snyder cautions: “The task of every Christian as an individual is to carefully study the perfections of God in order to know Him and live unto Him. When this duty is neglected and other matters become our primary focus, we drift from a biblical understanding of God, and the religious and secular cultures around us fashion our understanding of Him. If this continues for any length of time, we come to a place where we barely recognize the God of the Bible. Certain passages begin to sound strange to us. We read the Bible and say, ‘That does not sound like God to me’” (*Behold Your God: The Weight of Majesty*, 137).

John 17:3 *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

1 Timothy 2:5 *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

FALSE GODS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. Rachel’s household gods (Gen. 31:19)
2. The golden calf at Sinai (Ex. 32)
3. Nanna, the moon god of Ur, worshiped by Abraham before his salvation (Josh. 24:2)
4. Asherah, or Ashtaroth, the chief goddess of Tyre (Judg. 6:24-32)
5. Dagon, the chief Philistine agriculture and sea god and father of Baal (Judg. 16; 1 Sam. 5)
6. Ashtoreth, a Canaanite goddess, another consort of Baal (1 Sam. 7:3-4)
7. Molech, the god of the Ammonites and the most horrible idol in Scripture (1 Kg. 11)
8. The two golden images made by King Jeroboam, set up at Dan and Bethel (1 Kg. 12)
9. Baal, the chief deity of Canaan (1 Kg. 18; 2 Kg. 10, 11)
10. Rimmon, the Syrian god of Naaman the leper (2 Kg. 5:15-19)

11. Nisroch, the Assyrian god of Sennacherib (2 Kg. 19:37)
 12. Nebo, the Babylonian god of wisdom and literature (Isa. 46:1)
 13. Merodach, also called Marduk, the chief Babylonian god (Jer. 50:2)
 14. Tammuz, husband of Ishtar, goddess of fertility (Ezek. 8:14)
 15. The golden image in the plain of Dura (Dan. 3)
- (This list is from *The MacArthur Study Bible*, note on Genesis 31:19.)

OUR RESPONSE TO THE ONE TRUE GOD

We should believe the testimony of Scripture about the one true God, and we should seek to know, honor, and obey Him. On the other hand, we should reject the lie that other gods exist and have nothing to do with all false gods. The one true God of Scripture deserves and demands our complete devotion and loyalty.

Exodus 20:3 *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

Psalms 16:4-5 *Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.*

Psalms 73:25 *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

Lawson rightly concludes, “God is without peer and without equal, the only true God. This undivided God demands our exclusive loyalty to Him. He alone is God, and He alone must be our sole trust and confidence. God and God alone must be our hope in this life and the life to come. He only is worthy of our supreme affection and strongest allegiance” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 40).

KNOWING GOD THROUGH HIS ATTRIBUTES

A. W. Tozer writes, “An attribute of God is whatever God has in any way revealed as being true of Himself.” He adds, “The study of the attributes of God, far from being dull and heavy, may for the enlightened Christian be a sweet and absorbing spiritual exercise. To the soul that is athirst for God, nothing could be more delightful” (*Knowledge of the Holy*, 20). “The Bible,” Louis Berkhof observes, “never operates with an abstract concept of God, but always describes Him as the Living God, who enters into various relations with His creatures, relations which are indicative of several different attributes” (*Systematic Theology*, 27). What are the attributes of God? Snyder describes three essential qualities of God’s attributes (*Behold Your God*, 6-7):

1. An attribute is something that God has revealed to be true about Himself. This is not a truth that we discover on our own.
2. An attribute is something that is essentially true of God. It is who He is, not merely how He acts; therefore, He never needs to maintain it.
3. An attribute is something that is in perfect harmony with all other attributes. Every attribute of God influences all other attributes.

“The attributes of God,” writes Bancroft, “are those distinguishable characteristics of the divine nature which are inseparable from the idea of God and which constitute the basis and ground

for His various manifestations to His creatures. We call them attributes because we are compelled to attribute them to God as fundamental qualities or powers of His being, in order to give account of certain constant facts in God's self-revelation." He adds, "All God's revelations are, therefore revelations of Himself in and through His attributes. Our aim must be to determine from God's words and works what qualities, dispositions, determinations, and powers of otherwise unseen and unsearchable essence He has actually made know to us; or in other words, what are the revealed attributes of God" (*Christian Theology: Biblical and Systematic*, 67-68). Berkhof says the attributes "may be defined as the perfections which are predicated of the Divine Being in Scripture, or are visibly exercised by Him in His works of creation, providence, and redemption" (*Systematic Theology*, 39).

Theologians have attempted to classify God's attributes using different methods. Probably the most common classification is two-fold: 1) incommunicable attributes, and 2) communicable attributes. The incommunicable attributes are those that God does not share or "communicate" to others. The communicable attributes are those that God shares or "communicates" with us. Examples of God's incommunicable attributes are His eternity, immutability (unchangeableness), omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. Examples of God's communicable attributes are His love, mercy, faithfulness, and patience. However Wayne Grudem cautions: "Each description of one of God's attributes must be understood in the light of everything else that Scripture tells us about God. If we fail to remember this, we will inevitably understand God's character wrongly. For example, we have an idea of love from human experience. That helps us to understand what Scripture means when it says that God is love, but our understanding of the meaning of 'love' when applied to God is not identical with our experience of love in human relationships" (*Systematic Theology*, 159).

As we explore the glorious attributes of God in the subsequent chapters of this book we would do well to remember the wise words of Berkhof: "The only proper way to obtain perfectly reliable knowledge of the divine attributes is by the study of God's self-revelation in Scripture. It is true that we can acquire some knowledge of the greatness and power, the wisdom and goodness of God through the study of nature, but for an adequate conception of even these attributes it will be necessary to turn to the Word of God. In the theology of revelation we seek to learn from the Word of God which are the attributes of the Divine Being. Man does not elicit knowledge from God as he does from other objects of study, but God conveys knowledge of Himself to man, a knowledge which man can only accept and appropriate" (*Systematic Theology*, 41-42). Another helpful word of caution comes from the pen of Lewis Chafer: "The attributes of God form and interwoven and interdependent communion of facts and forces which harmonize in the Person of God. An omission or slighting of any of these, or any disproportionate emphasis upon any one of them cannot but lead to fundamental error of immeasurable magnitude. A mighty task is committed to the student of theology to discover these attributes and exhibit them according to truth" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:223). May God help us to be faithful in this privileged assignment.

Theologians often refer to God's attribute as "perfections" because all of His character qualities are absolutely perfect. Human beings and other creatures have attributes, but only God has perfections. The following chapters of this book seek to explore the riches of biblical truth about God's attributes. There are so many wonderful things to know about God and yet there is always so much more to learn. The more we know of Him, the more we realize how very little

we know. At the same time, the better we come to know God, the more we love and desire Him. As we continue our study of God and His perfections may we offer this prayer ascribed to Richard of Chichester (1197-1253): “May I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day” (cited in Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1:531).

THE SIMPLICITY OF GOD

It is important to note that, although God has many different attributes, His being is simple and not compound. “God’s simplicity is his indivisibility, his perfect lack of composition,” write MacArthur and Mayhue (*Biblical Doctrine*, 174). Lawson comments: “God is inseparably connected to the entirety of His being. Theologians sometimes call this God’s simplicity, meaning He is not composed of segmented parts. Rather, God exists as one unified whole without any divisions in His being. There is not a part of God that is isolated from the rest of Him. Each of His attributes encompasses the whole of His divine being” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 62). In other words, His attributes are not component parts which make up the whole of God.

Some theologians treat the simplicity of God as one of His attributes. God is inherently simple in the sense that His nature is undivided, so it is correct to say that God is entirely good, entirely great, entirely holy, etc., in His being. By the term “simplicity” Chafer says “it is indicated the divine Being is uncompounded, incomplex, and indivisible” (*Systematic Theology*, 1:213). Berkhof writes, “From the simplicity of God it follows that God and His attributes are one. The attributes cannot be considered as so many parts of God that enter into the composition of God, for God is not, like men, composed of different parts... It is commonly said in theology that God’s attributes are God Himself, as He has revealed Himself to us.” He further cautions, “Naturally, we should guard against separating the divine essence and the divine attributes or perfections, and also against a false conception of the relation in which they stand to each other. The attributes are real determinations of the Divine Being or, in other words, qualities that inhere in the Being of God... It would be a mistake to conceive of the essence of God as existing by itself and prior to the attributes, and of the attributes as additive and accidental characteristics of the Divine Being. They are essential qualities of God, which inhere in His very Being and are co-existent with it. These qualities cannot be altered without altering the essential Being of God. And since they are essential qualities, each one of them reveals to us some aspect of the Being of God” (*Systematic Theology*, 31-32).

The doctrine of God’s simplicity is compatible with His triunity, as MacArthur and Mayhue explain: “God’s simplicity does not contradict the doctrine of the Trinity. God’s essence is not composed of three persons. Rather, the uncompounded, undivided divine essence exists in each of the three persons. The various personal properties unique to each person are not things added to the divine essence but are only distinctions of personal subsistence and of relationship. In all the external works of the Trinity, each person acts without dividing the divine essence” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 174).

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND MEDITATION

1. What are six false views of God mentioned in this chapter?
2. What is the difference between dogmatic and practical atheism?
3. What are the two primary ways in which God reveals Himself?
4. When did God first reveal Himself as the one true God?
5. Was the one true God known by all people in the world?
6. Does God hold all people accountable for the truth He reveals about Himself?
7. When did people first invent and worship false gods?
8. What are the reasons why people reject the one true God?
9. What are the attributes of God and why are they important?
10. When the seraphim around God's throne cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3), do you think they are seeing the earth from a somewhat different perspective than ours? In what ways? How can we begin to see the world more from this perspective? (This question is posed by Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 144).

People may love a god of their own imaginations, when they are far from loving such a God as reigns in heaven. Having formed in their minds such a God as suits them, and thinking God to be such a one as favors and agrees with them, they may like him very well when they are far from loving the true God.

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-1758)

The gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that compose the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech.

A. W. TOZER (1897-1963)