

Doctrine of God – MTC August 2017 ¹

1. Which God?

Act out 1 Kings 18:20-40

- What is the big issue? (v21)
- How do the prophets of Baal pray? What does that tell you about how they think of their god and what he is like?
- How does Elijah pray? How is his prayer different to the prayers of the prophets of Baal? What does that tell you about Elijah's God?
- Why is it important, when people are talking about 'God' that we first try to find out which 'God' they are talking about and what he is like?

"Who do you mean by 'God'?" We naturally have a false idea of who God is. "God" is not obvious. We need to ask, Who is this 'God' we're talking about?

- So what is your God like? How do you describe him? What can you say about him?
- How much of this could you say of Allah?

The question is who is the God of the Bible – the Christian God – the one we know and love, who's saved us personally?

2. The Christ-like God

Group Bible study: Colossians 1:15-23

Read Colossians 1:15-23

- How can we see the invisible God? (v15)
- Do you think there are other ways we can know what God is like? What other ways do people suggest by which we can know what God is like?
 - John 14:6-10 – how do we see the Father?
 - Matthew 11:27 – how do we know the Father?
 - 2 Corinthians 4:6 – how do we know the glory of God?
- What do you learn here about Jesus? (v16-20) Is this how you normally think about him?
- "Imagine if you made heaven and earth... Imagine if everything held together only because of you. And imagine if your creatures whom you made out of sheer love, hated you, were at war with you and committed horrendous evil against you and against everything you loved. What would you do?"²
- What then is the (wonderful) surprise of verses 20-22?

¹ Throughout this paper I am quite dependent on the work of Glen Scrivener on his blog [Christ the Truth](#) and particularly his 2012 [Lent Course on the Doctrine of God for the Hailsham Churches](#).

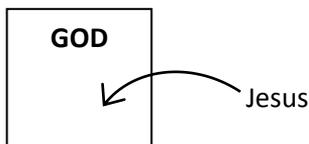
² From sermon by Glen Scrivener.

- Since Jesus is revealing the invisible God, how does his life (e.g. in the Gospels where we see Jesus humbling himself, washing feet, laughing and crying, eating with sinners) reshape our view of what *God* is like?
- How has this study changed the way you think about God and about Jesus?

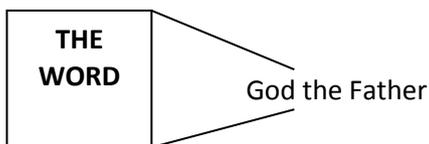
Jesus is God-sized
 God is Jesus-shaped (G. Scrivener)

Jesus is the full and only revelation of God:

John 1:18 – how is the invisible God make known?



Usually we start with God and then try to fit Jesus into that category and then the Spirit.



John starts with the Word (v1) – he is God, he is the full revelation of God – that’s why he’s called the Word – he is the self-expression, the self-disclosure of God – v18.

There is nothing of God beyond or outside or behind Jesus.

He is The image of God, The Word of God

An English poet called Byron said “If God isn’t like Jesus he ought to be” – and he is – God is Jesus-shaped. So we’ve got to get out of our minds this idea of God as some abstract concept or a giant policeman in the sky. Look at Jesus washing feet, laughing and crying, eating with sinners – that’s what God is like.

A few objections:

- What about creation? – It’s the word of Christ (Romans 1:17-18) but it’s always suppressed (Romans 1:18) and only through the lens of Scripture can we begin read it as all about Him (e.g. John 12:24)³
- What about philosophy? Futile (Romans 1:21); not possible to know the true biblical Triune God this way (1 Cor. 20-21)
- What about other religions? Idolatry (Romans 1:25) A lot of people would say other religions are worshipping the true God in some way, or there are things we can learn from their spirituality, or at least there are things there which we can build on – Not what the Bible says – worshipping demons, nothing to learn, don’t try to build on it – its sinking sand (Numbers 33:50-53; Deut 7:1-6; 12:1-3; 29:16-18; 32:15-21; Psalm 96:4-5; 106:35-40; 115:2-8; 135:15-18; Isa. 41:24, 29; 44:9-20; 41:21-24; 44:6-26; Jeremiah 10:3-16; 16:19-21; Acts 17:24-30; 19:26; 20:21; Romans 1:23-25; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:20.)

³ See further on this: <https://watumishwaneno.wordpress.com/2012/06/15/the-rain-of-christ/>

- What about in the Old Testament? The LORD speaking and saving and being trusted in the OT is often identifiable as the second person of the Trinity, the Word, *Jesus* (John 1:18; Gen. 12:7).⁴

The question is which God you believe in
 God is Jesus-shaped
 Jesus is the full and only revelation of God

- If Jesus is THE revelation of the invisible God, how does this change the way we do evangelism and apologetics with atheists, with nominal 'Christians' or with Muslims?
- How much of our Christianity is focused on 'God' but not very specifically on Jesus? How much of the preaching that we hear is just about 'God' but with no mention of Jesus? Is that a problem?

Appendix: The Attributes of God

Here are some common ways to talk about him:

D. Miller, *Discipling Nations*, YWAM, 2001

God is personal – reality is relational, a Creator relating to his creatures who are made in his image to relate to one another – the universe is physical and spiritual
 Versus secularism – reality is ultimately only a physical machine
 Versus animism – reality is ultimately only spiritual

God is rational – the universe is intelligible – revelation gives us a foundation for observation
 Versus secularism – no ultimate truth, just observe, ultimately subjective
 Versus animism – all is mystery, just meditate and hope for mystical experience

God is good – the universe is moral
 Versus secularism – no truth, ultimately amoral, subjective
 Versus animism – god(s) is/are both good and evil, dualism

W. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, IVP, 1999

Incommunicable attributes (possessed by God alone):

1. Independence – God does not need us (though we do bring him glory and joy)
2. Unchangeableness – his being, perfections and purposes are constant (he is passionate but is not changeable, needy or subject to outside influence)
3. Eternity – no beginning and end, sees all time (but he does act within time)
4. Omnipresence – present everywhere (but active in different ways in different places)⁵
5. Unity – every attribute of God is true of all of God's being all of the time

Communicable attributes (shared *to some extent* with humanity):

1. Being:

⁴ See also Hebrews 11:26; Jude 5; 1 Cor. 10; John 8:56-58; Hebrews 11:26; Jude 5; Ezek. 34//John 10; Isaiah 45:23//Phil 2:10-11; Zech. 12:10//John 19:37; Isaiah 60:19-20//Rev. 21:23).

⁵ As Augustine discovered, God is not spatial, he has no body or parts, he fills all but not as a liquid or substance, he is the uncreated Creator.

- a. Spirituality – non-material being
- b. Invisibility – his spiritual being is unseen
- 2. Mental:
 - a. Omniscience – knowing all things actual and possible
 - b. Wisdom – chooses best goals and best means to reach them
 - c. Truthfulness & faithfulness
- 3. Moral:
 - a. Goodness, mercy, grace
 - b. Love – giving himself
 - c. Holiness – separate from sin
 - d. Righteousness, justice
 - e. Jealousy
 - f. Wrath
- 4. Purpose:
 - a. Will, freedom
 - b. Omnipotence – power & sovereignty
- 5. General/summary:
 - a. Perfection – possessing all excellent qualities to an infinite degree
 - b. Blessedness – perfectly happy and joyful in himself
 - c. Beauty – does not lack anything desirable

This is all true. Wonderfully true. There's a lot of useful stuff in these sort of presentations and it is indeed well worth meditating on these different attributes of God but... there are some problems with this kind of approach:

- 1. Can come across as dry and boring – God is not boring!
- 2. Abstract idea versus person
- 3. Atemporal versus story – in many ways when you ask the Bible 'Who is God?' the Bible's answer is 'This is what he has *done* – *that* is who he is'
- 4. Lacks unity – how does it all hold together?
- 5. Theistic – a lot of this you could say about Allah or some God of philosophy – he is an omni-being – a big giant in the sky