

English Transcript

Foundations of the Christian Faith – Course 1

Lesson 3 God the Father (Part 1)

Welcome back to Foundations for the Christian Faith, Course 1. We are continuing with Lesson 3 as we begin a two-lesson study on God the Father. This is the beginning of “Theology Proper,” the study of God. We will begin on page 20 in your handout.

Let us start by reading Psalm 113:5-6.

“Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?”

There are a few questions in your handout to reflect on.

- ***Is there anyone or anything completely like God?***
Throughout the scriptures, we are told repeatedly, there is no one like our God. You can verify these passages on your own but here are just a few Scriptures that affirm this truth: Ex 9:14; Deut 3:24, 33:26; 2 Sam 2:2; 1 Kings 8:23; 1 Chron 17:20; Ps 86:8; Is 46:9; Jer 10:6-7
- ***What is God's relationship to creation?***
When you look at verse 6, it says, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? God is not part of the creation. God sits outside of the creation. He is over the creation. He is the Creator, Jehovah Elohim.
- ***Why do you think the psalmist asks this question?***
Who is like our God? It might be because our world is filled with false gods and idols. Consider Isaiah 40:18-20, 25-31.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?

¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

An idol is anything that takes the place of God. Only God is worthy of glory, honor, and praise.

- ***What is an appropriate response to the question?***

The only response is no one is like the LORD our God! And our only response to that is to worship God for who He is.

Look at the shaded box on the right side of this page that contains a few statements of who God is. In the next two lessons, we will look at what the Bible says about God, how God has revealed himself to us through the Bible. God is Spirit. God is Light (Holy). God is Love. God is a Consuming Fire. God is the only Living God. And in these two lessons we will see that He is al of this and so much more. There is no one like our God!

The Existence of God

People from all walks of life, every culture and every nation, accept the notion of the existence of God (or at least gods). The Bible begins with this assumption: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).” It is a universal belief that there is a God. Why is this so? There are several lines of evidence which point to the existence of God.

- ***Human beings have an inner sense of God.***

We see this in Romans 1:19-25.

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 people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

- ***Nature gives evidence of the existence and nature of God.***

We saw this in Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:20 when we discussed General Revelation.

- ***The Bible gives evidence of the existence of God.***

Everywhere it assumes the existence of God. Since there are many evidences of the truthfulness and inspiration of the Bible, its words provide powerful evidence that God is real.

- ***God provides a witness for us in our hearts and the logic of our minds.***

We call this our conscience. We discussed this in support of General Revelation in a prior lesson from Romans 2:14-15.

- ***In the end, only God can overcome our sin and persuade us of His existence.***

Only God can change our hearts so that we seek him.

“⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power. (2 Cor 2:4-5)”

With all this evidence, why do people still question the existence of God?

It must relate to our sin nature and our darkened minds and spirits that are separated from God.

How has God revealed himself to all people across all times?

We have discussed this in prior lessons. God reveals Himself through creation, through our conscience, and through the Word of God.

What is the result when people ignore God's creative power, ignore their conscience, turn from God?

The Bible says this is foolishness.

What should the general revelation of God seen in nature lead us to do?

We should seek God, respond to His light, respond to how He has revealed Himself to us.

What does the Bible reveal about God's feelings for humans?

The message throughout the Bible is that because God is love, He loves us with an everlasting love. Love is the motivating factor in all that God does because that is who He is. His nature is love. He is not just loving, He is love.

As you turn to page 21, consider this question: **Can we know God?**

Unquestionably, the knowledge of God is desirable. The religious yearnings of mankind testify to that. But is it possible?

Now the Scriptures attest to two truths that are at first glance seem contradictory - The incomprehensibility of God and the knowability of God. We can say that God is unknowable and God is knowable at the same time.

Well, how can that be?

To say that we cannot comprehend God is to assert that the human mind cannot grasp the knowledge of God. Consider these three passages:

- Romans 11:33-36
Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?” For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.
- Job 11:7
Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?

- Isaiah 40:18
With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?

On the other hand, to say that God is knowable is to claim that He can be known. Consider these passages:

- John 14:7
If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."
- John 17:3
Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.
- 1 John 5:20
We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.
- Jeremiah 9:23-24
This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.
- Ephesians 1:15-17
For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Both statements are true, though neither in the absolute sense. The incomprehensibility or the inability to truly know God does not mean that we can know nothing about God.

Rather, it means that our knowledge is partial and limited, falling short of total or comprehensive knowledge. The knowledge that God does reveal to us is both real and useful. We can know God to the degree that He chooses to reveal Himself.

God is the one who is revealing Himself to us, so we should turn to the book that He gave us to know Him better. First, we can look at the relational nature of God. The very design of nature reflects God's choice to reveal Himself to humanity. What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. God exists in relationship in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit. And God created us to be in relationship with him and with others. The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, and the second is like it, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The Bible tells the remarkable story of redemption of a sinning, rebellious humanity. It is the story of relationship created in the garden, broken by sin, then redeemed through the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus. This powerfully demonstrates God's relational nature.

On page 22, you see that there are a number of misconceptions about God.

As we consider the relational nature of God, it is helpful to define the concept of personhood. We say that there is one God and He exists in three equal and distinct persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We refer to this concept as the Trinity. We will explore the doctrine of each person of the Trinity in this course. Since we are created in the image and likeness of God, as humans, we have personhood as well.

What are the three essential traits of personhood? There must be intellect, emotion and will.

We see all three revealed in Scripture related to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We also possess intellect, emotion, and will. This is what sets us apart from animals and the rest of creation. In addition to this concept of the personhood of God, there are several other misconceptions about God.

- **Many believe that God is distant.**

The truth is that God is near.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. (Psalm 139:7-12)

Come near to God and he will come near to you. (James 4:8a)

- **Others believe God watches our actions from afar.**

The truth is God is intimately involved in every detail of our lives.

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? (Matthew 6:25-30; Luke 12:6-7)

- **It is a misconception that God is waiting to judge those who do wrong.**

The truth is God is waiting to forgive all who ask to be forgiven.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:17)

- **Some think that God is powerless against or does not care much about evil in the world.**

The truth is that God allows an evil world to continue to exist so that more people might be saved out of it.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

- **A final misconception is the world sees God as unapproachable.**

The truth is that God is relational. He wants us to know and understand him.

This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

God has revealed Himself to us. He has come to us. He has given us His word. He has revealed Himself through creation in general revelation and He has revealed Himself through His word through special revelation. Jesus taught us to call God our Father. This is a very relational concept. Below are just a few examples of how God relates as good Father to those who trust in Jesus. You may look up the Scripture references that are included in your handout.

- Our Father is willing to make sacrifices. He sent His Son into the world to die as our Savior.
- Our Father has compassion and love for His children.
- Our Father guides His children.
- Our Father knows our needs before we ask.
- Our Father rewards us.
- Our Father makes us heirs. We have a wonderful inheritance.
- Our Father encourages us.
- Our Father shows no favoritism among his children. There is no impartiality whether Jew or Gentile.

We can see clearly that God has revealed His relational nature to us through His Word. He has also revealed His character to us through His attributes. Attributes are qualities that are inherent to a subject. They identify, distinguish, or analyze the subject. The various attributes of God are not component parts of God. Each describes His total being.

Love, for example, is not part of God's nature. God's total being is love. Although God may display one quality or another at a given time, no quality is independent or preeminent over any others. Whenever God displays His wrath, He is still love. When He shows His love, He does not abandon His holiness. God is more than the sum of His attributes.

There is an activity for you to complete on page 23. After describing the activity, I will ask you to pause the recording to complete this work on your own before continuing with the lesson.

The chart of page 23 has two words, **"God is ..."**.

Take a few minutes to write down as many answers to that statement based on your understanding of the Scriptures. This will be your list to define the character of God. When you have completed your list, restart the recording and we will discuss this further.

As you begin, take note of the quote at the bottom of page 23.

"The worst deed committed in the universe is failure to give God honor and glory. Of everything else, God is to be glorified. To glorify God is to exalt him, to recognize him as supremely worthy of honor, and to acknowledge his divine attributes. Since the glory of God is a manifestation of all the attributes of his being, of all he has revealed of himself to man, to give God glory is to acknowledge his glory and to extol it." John MacArthur

Pause the recording and complete your list of God's character/attributes.

Welcome back. How did you do?

If we were doing this in a group, I would start by asking people to share their answers to the statement, **"God is ..."**

I would write their responses on the flip chart. They would begin telling me things like,

God is unchanging. God is love. God is holy. God is sovereign. God is creator. God is Lord. God is eternal. God is all-knowing. God is just. God is faithful. God is our guide. God is our Savior. God is the Redeemer. God is a Good Shepherd. God is our Provider.

As they share responses, I would write them in three different columns. At the end of the activity, I would ask the group, now look at these three columns. What do the words and phrases in each column represent?

Column 1 contains the following responses: **"God is ..."**

Self-existing. Independent. Unchanging. Infinite. Transcendent. Eternal. All-knowing. Ever-present. All-powerful. Unified. Sovereign, Spirit.

I would then ask the group to explain why I placed these attributes in the same column. Eventually it becomes clear that these attributes are unique to God alone. They are not shared with humanity.

The second column contains response like this: **“God is ...”**

Love. Good. Merciful. Gracious. Holy. Patient. Peace. Righteous. Just. Wrath. Faithful. True. Wise. Jealous. Good

Again, I would ask how these attributes are related. The group will come to see that these are all attributes that God shares with humans who are created in His image and likeness. These are called the moral attributes or the shared attributes of God.

Since we are created in the image and likeness of God, even after the fall, we continue to be created in the image and likeness of God. The image is tarnished, but God still places His image within us. Through our faith in Christ, we are being renewed in the image and likeness of our Creator.

We can love. We can demonstrate goodness. We can show mercy. We are called to be holy. God produces His fruit in us such as love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. We are called to pursue righteousness, purity. Wisdom, faith, and truth.

In these two lists we have summarized the unique and shared attributes of God. Then I would ask about the third column. The column includes things like, **“God is ...”**
Creator. Lord. Adonai. Sovereign, The One who Sees. The Healer. Good Shepherd. The Sustainer. Self-sufficient One. El Shaddai. Provider - Jehovah Jireh. The Sanctifier. Jehovah Nissi. Peace. Righteousness. Counselor. The Way, the Truth, the Life. Savior. Redeemer.

What becomes clear is that these are all names of God. Not only has God revealed Himself through His character, but He has also revealed Himself through various names. And many of these names come out of events and circumstances that took place in the Bible.

For example, in Genesis 22 with Abraham and Isaac, Isaac asked, where is the lamb? And Abraham said, God will provide. And as Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac, God said, stop. Abraham, I know that you love me. And in the thicket was a ram. God revealed Himself to Abraham, and to us, as Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides.

And as the handout continues, on pages 24 through 26, there are definitions of each of the unique attributes of God. These are also called the incommunicable attributes of God.

I will list these and you can read the handout for the description and look up the Scripture references.

- **God is Independent.** He is Yahweh, the I Am or the Self-Sufficient One.
- **God is Unchanging.** We call that Immutable. His character and personality remain the same from eternity past to eternity future. His purposes regarding his creation remain unchanged from the beginning. His promises never fail. This trait of God is sometimes called immutability.
- **God is Infinite.** He is transcendent. He is outside of creation.

- **God is Eternal.** He has no beginning and no end. We are Immortal. We have a beginning, but we will live forever, either in the presence of God or separated eternally from the presence of God.
- **God is Ever-Present.** We call that Omnipresent. He fills every part of the universe. God has no spatial dimensions. He cannot be contained by space, no matter how large. God can be present in diverse ways in separate places at the same time. God is present with us wherever we are and sees all that occurs. Nothing escapes His attention.
- **God All-Knowing.** He is Omniscient. God knows everything about the universe and every person and thing in it. At this moment, God knows all that has occurred in the past and all that could or will occur in the future, with equal clarity. His knowledge is complete and He is outside of time. He knows from all eternity, whatever will happen. In response to God's omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as wise and good.
- **God is All-powerful.** We call that Omnipotent. God can do anything consistent with his own nature. The word Almighty is only used of God in the Bible, occurring 56 times. It is the basis of the concept of omnipotence.

There are natural limitations and self-imposed limitations.

Natural limitations include things God cannot do because they are contrary to His nature. God cannot lie. He cannot be tempted to sin. He cannot deny himself.

There are self-imposed limitations that include those things God has chosen to include or exclude from His sovereign plan. For example, God did not choose to spare his Son. He did not choose to save all people. He did not choose all nations in the Old Testament. He did not choose Esau. He did not choose to spare James in Acts chapter 12. Though He could have done any of these things without being inconsistent with His omnipotence, He did not choose to do so because of His sovereign plan.

- **God is Unified.** This is an important concept. God is not divided into parts. You can see a picture of this on page 26. God is not divided into distinct parts. The Scriptures will highlight different attributes at various times.

The Scriptures never single out one attribute of God as more important than all the rest. Every attribute is completely true of God's character. For example, God is light and God is love. There is no suggestion that part of God is light and part of God is love. Nor should we think that God is more light than love or more love than light. Rather, it is God Himself who is light and God Himself who is love.

So if we looked at God as being divided, we would divide the circle into however many attributes there are, and each attribute would represent certain portion of God. That would be a false view of God.

Because God is unified, every attribute would be a full circle. I would draw one circle, God is love, and I would draw another circle God is holy. God is merciful. God is unchanging., God is omnipotent. God is all-knowing.

And the glory of God is not an additional attribute of God. The glory of God is a manifestation of all who God is. So, when you look at all the attributes of God, that is the Shekinah glory, the light that we would see when all of God is revealed to us.

“Since the glory of God is a manifestation of all the attributes of his being, of all he has revealed of himself to man, to give God glory is to acknowledge his glory and to extol it.”

John MacArthur

Hopefully, this provides you with a picture of the difference between seeing God as divided, broken into distinct parts, versus God being unified.

As we close out this lesson and continue with lesson 4, we know that God is beyond our full understanding and He has chosen to make Himself known to us. His unique attributes remind us that He is above us, as far as the heavens are above the earth, yet He is also personal and relational. We cannot fully know God, yet we can know Him on a personal basis, to the degree that He has chosen to reveal Himself to us. This is wondrous and worthy of praise.

In lesson 4, we will continue by looking at the shared attributes of God, which are also called the moral attributes of God. We will also explore the ways that God has revealed his nature and character to us through His names.

God bless.