

# THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

## (A SYNOPSIS)

### HIS BEING & PERSONALITY

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The dignity and awesome majesty of the Being of God is acknowledged as we commence this study. The subject is profound and inexhaustible. In this paper we can hope only to discuss, in brief, some of the great issues that flow from a consideration of the One we have come to know as 'our Father'.
- 1.2 Only sons can speak intimately of a father. So it is with God. While the believer in the Word, born into the family of God by the new birth can claim a unique intimacy with God, He still remains the Creator of all things, the Father of eternity and the God of Glory.
- 1.3 The Apostle Paul in his address on Mar's Hill (Acts 17:24-29) referring to the UNKNOWN god whom the Greeks ignorantly worshipped, said "*him declare I unto you*" and there follows a master dissertation of this God who we have come to know, by grace through faith.

#### 2.0 THE BEING OF GOD

##### 2.1 The basis of Theism.

Theism can be defined as the belief in God as a PERSON, a Being who is the object of worship. It is, in fact, the belief that this God has REVEALED Himself in the Person of His Son.

Scripture does not set out to prove the existence of God. It states, as a matter of fact, that "*In the beginning God*" (Genesis 1:1) and in the New Testament, "*In the beginning....and the Word was God*" (John 1:1).

Romans 1:19 gives a hint that man - even unregenerate - can be assured of the existence of God. The proof used is the CREATION, the natural and physical and indicates that behind nature's laws is nature's Lord. It is, however, true, that the greatest comprehension of God come through the supernatural, that is the SPIRITUAL. It brings into

focus REVELATION, INSPIRATION and FAITH.

It is true that the existence of God cannot be intellectually proved, but we will look at some considerations, which, if taken together, form compelling arguments for God's existence.

Strong credence must be given to an intuition in the heart of man that makes him want to worship - the monkeys in the trees don't have this!! Billy Graham called it the 'fifth dimension'. A something that is outside time and space. It must also be said that to make this dimension viable, there is a demand from the human heart for PRESENCE, POWER and PERFECTION, in other words PERSONALITY.

## 2.2 Intellectual Arguments.

Five such arguments used by scholars deserve a brief mention:

### 2.2.1 Ontological:

This means 'perfection' as an ideal; or to express it "I have an idea of the most perfect being" - free from all limitations, totally impeccable! If this can be found then there must be an actual Being - the ABSOLUTE - Being of BEINGS must exist, or else all other existence is impossible and without meaning.

### 2.2.2 Cosmological:

This Being does not exist apart from the Universe. He is the FIRST CAUSE and the Universe with its order and organisation demands a FIRST CAUSE. An idea not new to the New Testament (Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:3).

### 2.2.3 Teleological:

This is related to 2.2.2. and has to do with the DESIGN argument: natural forces; the immensity of space; the marvels of every created thing, these and a lot more argue that there is a grand design. And there can be no design without a designer! We are considering something far more

than a haphazard kaleidoscope.

#### 2.2.4 Anthropological:

This says that this absolute FIRST CAUSE - Being of Beings - is Personality, which is greater than man or any other intelligent thing.

Old fashioned Pantheism and modern New Age culture unites to proclaim that God is EVERYTHING and EVERYTHING is God! - even man is a god and man produces God! The revelation in the Bible states the very opposite. God produces the man in His image and ultimately produced the God/Man - the Word Incarnate.

#### 2.2.5 Moral Purpose:

It is inconceivable that such a Being should bring the Universe into existence for no reason and without an objective. There has got to be a purpose for it all. The Scriptures give support to this. Ephesians 1:8 says that "*all things are to be summed up in Christ*" and Colossians 1:16 tells us that "*by him and for him all things were created*". Hebrews 2:10 gives us the grand design, seeing the Son of God "*as the captain (pioneer) of salvation bringing many sons to glory*".

### 2.3 The Historical Jesus:

The historicity of Jesus is an indisputable fact. Setting aside all the interpretations and arguments that surround His entry and departure from this planet, we must give a cogent reason for His being here and His unique character. What is behind the miraculous elements that made up His life and the everyday ordinary humanity that marked Him out as REAL man?

The fact that He, in His own words, said "*he came out from the Father*

*and am come into the world, again I leave the world and go to the Father".* John 16:28 indicates that He had 'prior' and 'after' existence to His years of manhood. The point of the argument is that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, eternally existent and the revelation of God to mankind.

### 3.0 THE NATURE OF GOD

#### 3.1 Infiniteness:

This is a term incomprehensible to man: not merely no beginning and no end, but LIMITLESS. It is impossible to measure, weigh or quantify, but FAITH allows belief in such a concept. An example of what faith can take in is found in 1 Kings 8:27 - "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee*".

#### 3.2 Transcendent and Immanent (Abiding in) :

Transcendent - that is - separate from His creatures while abiding with/in them.

It underlines the fact that although He is distinct from His created ones He is intimately connected and involved with them. Again, for Scriptural backing we refer to the Apostles words "*by him all things hold together*" - *Colossians 1:16*. Also Acts 17:24-28. Both of these characteristics must be equally balanced.

T,C. Hammond gives a useful comment into the consequences of imbalance:

- Agnosticism - stresses only the MYSTERY of God and says 'I don't know'.
- Deism - stresses apartness (transcendence) and says 'He is not one of us'.
- Pantheism - emphasises immanence and says 'God is everything and Everything is God'.

Whereas the true revelation of God is a balance of all, a harmonious

blend Which embraces THEISM - stressing Personality.

### 3.3 Personality:

The Personality of God is difficult for human minds to grasp. But the Bible details ALL the elements of Personality - mind; emotions; will; reason; speech; action; etc. It is these combined features of Personality that give FLESH to the bones of the mechanical and physical and tell out that God IS and that He can be KNOWN. Faith says we must BELIEVE that *"he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* - *Hebrews 11:6*. Isaiah continues on the same theme, *"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found call upon him while he is near"*.

### 3.4 Immutability:

The key Scripture reference to this is 1 Timothy 1:17 - *"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, (incorruptible) invisible, the only God, be honour and Glory for ever and ever, Amen"*. This means He is unlimited by time and space, that He has no disposition and that His attributes are continuously constant. 1 John teaches that God not only loves but IS love

## 4.0 HIS ATTRIBUTES (Characteristic qualities)

We will consider these under two headings:

- NATURAL ATTRIBUTES
- MORAL ATTRIBUTES

### 4.1 Natural Attributes:

#### 4.1.1 Omnipotence:

That is the creative force or energy that is unsurpassed and is not dependent on any outside influence. It means independently ALL POWERFUL. It is, however, governed by God's self imposed laws (there is a law in mathematics that seven times one is seven, Omnipotence cannot make it eight!). This is not arbitrary or irrational, God will not and

cannot act outside the boundaries He has laid down in His wisdom for the proper workings of His universe. Omnipotence is sometimes manifested in the miraculous, but man is very often unaware of this because He chooses to allow measures which obscure His hand, e.g. natural healing. The creation and sustaining of animate and inanimate things are perhaps the greatest evidences of Omnipotence.

Some useful references: Job 42:2; Psalm 95:3 and 135:5-7; Jeremiah 32:17-18, Matthew 19:26; Mark 14:36.

#### 4.1.2 Omniscience:

The ALL KNOWING God that does not acquire knowledge. It is not attached or built on to His nature. For some, God's foreknowledge raises many difficulties, particularly in the context of freedom of action. Man is said to have a free will, but although as moral beings we have freedom of choice, we are NOT 'perfect' moral beings. If we were we could do only one thing in every situation - i.e. the right thing! The absence of alternatives is the highest form of freedom. But we must not allow our ideas of what we cannot or will do cloud the fact that God's foreknowledge can infallibly read a persons future, because He knows what ought to be and the defects which hinder its development.

Some key references: Psalm 33:13-15, 139:1-6 and 147:3-5; Ezekiel 11:9; Acts 15:18; 1 John 3:20.

#### 4.1.3 Omnipresence:

There are two principles governing Omnipresence. In the first place, God is so great that He cannot be separated from His own works and secondly, as FIRST CAUSE and Creator He is actively involved in every part of His creation. We must try to grasp the concept that God IS everywhere, in the same way

that God IS love. He is not partly present or sometimes present, e.g. Thomas after the resurrection. He is totally, wholly present to every person in every place. The believer, in many circumstances perceives a special presence, e.g. Matthew 18:20; Exodus 33:15.

Other references: Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:24; Acts 17:24-28; Isaiah 66:1.

#### 4.2 Moral Attributes (examples):

##### 4.2.1 Goodness:

God continually seeks the welfare of His creation. He gave to man the best and man spoiled it, The Old Testament has a recurring theme of God's goodness - Genesis 1 - "*And God saw that it was good*" is the formulae of creation. And as time passed and crises followed crises man demonstrated repeated failure. The Creator intervened in new beginnings, e.g. post flood; call of Abram; approach of God in Tabernacle and Temple; granting of a monarchy; restoration after captivity. Psalms 106 and 107 are testimonies to this principle.

##### 4.2.2 Holiness:

The often recurring phrase "*the Holy One of Israel*" implies separation from all that is impure. It also implies the concept of loftiness. It is that AWESOMENESS that puts the Creator on a totally different level from His created ones. Without this, holiness would have little meaning and man would conceive of a God made in his (man's) own image. The word '*holy*' appears 170 times in the first five books of the Bible. In the Psalms it occurs 30 times and about the same number in Isaiah.

##### 4.2.3 Righteousness:

This is the attribute which upholds the moral order in the world and establishes the principle of right and wrong, good and evil. The message of Romans 6-8 is that the righteousness of God revealed in the law shows man for what he is - unrighteous!. It follows, therefore, that there are connected attributes such as justice, truth, anger etc. Some find it difficult to reconcile justice with the injustices, inequalities and calamities which happen to people in the normal course of living. The Scriptural answer must be that, such happenings emerge as the result of man's departure from God. The Creator gave him freedom and he used it to his own destruction. The mercy and grace of God is continuously available to secure righteous acts, even though such acts are often done without the knowledge of the Sovereignty of God (see paragraph 6). God cannot give grace at the expense of justice and truth.

Some helpful references: Ezra 9:15; Psalm 11:7, 103: 6 and 114:17; John 17:25; Romans 2:2 and 3:4-6.

#### 4.2.4 Wisdom:

The heart is the seat of wisdom, "*He is wise in heart*" - *Job 9:4*. God, alone, possesses ALL wisdom. He is called "*the only wise God*" - *1 Timothy 1:17*. All the treasures of wisdom are vested in Him and are seen in His intelligence and precision working. As to His workings we have only to think of His Creatorial and Redemptive powers. The relationship of the earth to the sun and the appointment of the seasons of the year ( *Psalm 74:17*). The division of day and night, light and darkness. The division of the earth into land and sea (note all these are unique to the earth). "*O Lord how manifold are your works*" - *Psalm 104:24*. What can excel the wisdom of God in Redemption. That God, Himself, should be the Redeemer, become

incarnate and yet know no sin! And that He should devise a righteous way to condemn the sin but save the sinner. This is WISDOM indeed! But more, that God should take the redeemed sinner and place the treasure of the Gospel in him and send him into the world to preach it, is MARVELLOUS wisdom indeed!

#### 4.2.5 Justice:

Concerning God's justice Psalm 89:15 tells us that "*justice and judgment are the habitations of his throne*". Justice gives to everyone his due. God is an impartial judge, it cannot be otherwise, because of equal weight given to attributes of holiness, righteousness, mercy and grace. It is not only that God acts justly but IS just - Romans 11:33. The justice of God is evident in two ways; in regarding the righteous (Psalm 58:11) and punishing the offender by law (Romans 4:15). We may not see, or appear to see, justice done in this life, but eternity is to follow and then it will surely be done. The Lord never afflicts His people without a cause, the trials and afflictions of the Godly are to purify and refine them.

Other references: Job 8:3; Psalm 119:75-76; Romans 9:14.

#### 4.2.6 Mercy and Grace:

Mercy is that attribute of God which holds back God's judgment deserved by man. Grace, on the other hand gives to man what he does not deserve. It is true that the righteousness, holiness and justice of God demands that sin is punished and the guilty brought to justice. Exodus 34:6 says explicitly "*God can in no way clear the guilty*". But against this one statement there are five statements of mercy and grace! This is the kind of God we have!! So the grace of God is seen in longsuffering and an abundance of goodness. The greatest of which is salvation and eternal life. Psalm 57:10 tells us that

*"God's mercy is far above the heavens". Acts of severity are forced from God, "He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" - Lamentations 3:33. He is not, as is often pictured, a sadistic Creator who delights in administering pain. "He is slow to anger" - Psalm 103:28. He is called the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" - 2 Corinthians 1:3. Grace and Mercy are like an intertwined garland the one is impossible without the other. Titus 3:5 says "According to his mercy he saved us". Ephesians 2:8 says "that by grace we are saved through faith". It was Mercy that met the prodigal when his father welcomed him home, it was Grace that put the ring on his finger and shoes on his feet! It was Mercy that stopped the stoning of the adulteress in John 8, it was Grace that said "go and sin no more".*

#### 4.2.7 Love:

One brief word must suffice where volumes of books have expounded this highest of all attributes. The Hebrew word for love signifies love 'out of the bowels'. In Old Testament language 'bowels' were used to describe the centre or seat of the affections. In the New Testament there are three different words used for love, the one that is most used for the Love of God is AGAPE, meaning in the original Greek language the highest form of love, a love whose main characteristic is sacrificial giving. The Gospels and Epistles say all that need be said about Love and all are beautifully summed up by the Apostle John *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation - meeting place for our sins" - 1 John 2:1-2.*

## 5.0 THE DIVINE NAMES

The names applied to Deity are legion. In this study we will discuss the

subject briefly under three headings:

- General Names,
- The Covenant Name,
- Particular Names.

### 5.1 General Names:

EL (singular) occurs in Scriptures over 250 times. It is the Name of First Cause and Carries the idea of strength; "*the Lord Most High*" - *Genesis 14:18,22*, connected with A particular attribute of God, e.g. A merciful God, (Deuteronomy 4:31) or a jealous God (Exodus 20:5). There are a number of Hebrew combinations, two particular examples are:

- EL OLAM - The Everlasting God (Genesis 21:33 ),
- EL SHADDAI - God Almighty (Genesis 17:1).

ELOHIM (plural) occurs over 2000 times. It implies Godhead in the plural sense. It is used of the God of Creation; Providence; the Supreme ruler. Genesis 1:26 and 3:22.

### 5.2 The Covenant Name:

JAHVEH. This Hebrew form of the English 'JEHOVAH' is obtained by using the Hebrew consonants J, H, V and H, and the vowels of 'ADONAI', A, O, and A.

- J      H      V      H
- A      O      A

Devout Jews would not pronounce the sacred Name, so ADONAI was most used by The Jewish scribes. It is used 280 times in the Old Testament. Perhaps the best translation is 'Sovereign Lord' (N.I.V.). It conveys the meaning of "ownership". See for example Exodus 23:17 and Genesis 15:2.and 8. JAHVEH is also referred to as God's special 'Covenant' name (Malachi 3:6) and occurs in the Old Testament some

7000 times. The meaning is the Self Existing One.

### 5.3 Particular Names:

Many of these are compounds of the name JEHOVAH, as in the following titles:

- JEHOVAH JIREH - The Lord will see/provide (Genesis 22:14).
- JEHOVAH NISSI - The Lord my banner (Exodus 17:15-17),
- JEHOVAH ROPHEKA - The Lord that healeth (Exodus 15:26),
- JEHOVAH SHALOM - The Lord is my peace (Judges 6:24),
- JEHOVAH ROI - The Lord my shepherd (Psalm 23:1),
- JEHOVAH SHAMMAH - The Lord is there (Ezekiel 48:35),
- JEHOVAH TSIDKENU - The Lord my righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6).

## 6.0 THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

6.1 Providence in the Scriptural sense are those unexplainable acts of God which are seen throughout the world in the course of history. It is the ordering of events after the counsel of His will for His own glory. One of the puritan writers - Thomas Watson - says, "it is the eye that sees and the hand that turns all the wheels in the universe. God is not like a builder who builds a building then leaves it. He is actively working in His Creation". Jesus said "*My Father worketh hitherto and I work*" - *John 5:17*.

6.2 Scripture teaches that Providence is complete and all embracing (Psalm 135:6, Acts 4:28). It includes not only all persons but all actions and events. The Bible, however, opposes the ideas of 'chance' and 'fatalism'. Both reject the truth of a controlling Deity. The raven, a bird which scarcely feeds its young, providentially sustained the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:6).

In the example of Esther, that among all the young women brought before the king, she should find favour, was due to God's special providence. It was God's way of saving His people, a fact hidden from

the king.

- 6.3 It is often objected that there many things happening in the world which are disastrous, disorderly and irregular. How can God's providence be in such things? Many examples come to mind some of which are famines, earthquakes , terrorist activities. Has not history shown that even in events like these God has turned misery and suffering to man's benefit? He has often made the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10).

The prophet Habakkuk asks God to do something about Israel's gross sin, then when He does it through the Babylonian invasion, the Prophet complains about the method. He disagrees completely with what God is going to do, it seems unfair and unjust to use a more wicked nation to punish a less wicked!!

In the New Testament we could also think about the circumstances surrounding Paul's shipwreck.

- 6.4 Some will also object that in using evil to correct good, God is condoning sin. But this cannot be. God is not the author of sin, but in His providence He allows men to engage in sin. Without apparent intervention. Acts 15:16 "*...He suffered all nations to walk in their own ways*". Had God not permitted sin, we would never have known justice in punishing it and mercy in pardoning it.

- 6.5 Providence manifests itself in many 'accidental' ways. An example is in 1 Kings 22:34; the archer drew his bow and slung his shot without a target, a 'chance' shot. But that arrow was guided by God right between the joints in King Ahab's armour, "*so that he died*" fulfilling the prediction of the prophet and purpose of God. Things that seem to happen by chance or coincidence are really demonstrations of God's providence and the interpretation of His will.

It was Henry Law, the Puritan, who said "Great doors swing on small hinges". A 'chance' remark by a fellow prisoner to Joseph "Why do you look so sad today?" was the turning pointing Joseph's life. God had providentially ordained that the question be asked!

6.6 We must accept and submit to God's providence. King David learned this lesson in Psalm 39:9 - "...*I was dumb and opened not my mouth because you did it*". Job wrestled for a good part of his life with the providence of God and ended up saying "...*I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful to me that I did not know*" - Job 42:3.

## 7.0 DIVINE GOVERNMENT

Scripture reveals that God governs the intelligent people He has created (both humans and angels) according to fixed moral laws. For example, it is clear from the Scripture and spiritual experience that God has ordained Redemption as a cure for sin and fallen mankind. In this, He has ordered a process for man's recovery which results in a spiritual rule and authority in the life that changes aims, goals, habits, etc.

The Bible supports the view that God is able to and does use every means for the moral government of the world. We could think of Isaiah's challenge to the gods and his prediction that Cyrus should perform God's will (Isaiah 44:28, 45:17).

The Lord's rebuff to Satan, at His temptation (Matthew 4) when Satan offered to give Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The truth was, they were not his to give! Satan, like all others, even in his unfallen state, is a created being and subject to the authority of the Creator. It is true that Satan is called "*the god of this world; the prince of the power of the air*" (2 Corinthians 4:5, Ephesians 2:2) but this was granted to him by God to fulfil His sovereign purposes. And that for the lives of individuals in this 'present age' and NOT extending to the rule of the nations (Daniel 2:2-21, Psalm 76:8). In any event this earth (world) is a tiny orb in the vast Creation of God and His government is maintained in its maintenance and movement.

Other Scriptures for further study are: Psalm 33:13-17, 66:1-7, 72:11 and 75:6-8; Daniel 4:25; Romans 13:1 and 1 Timothy 1:15.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

As the subtitle to this subject states, this is by no means an exhaustive study. The Being of God is largely assumed in Scripture. The inspired authors do not seem to think it can be questioned. The consideration of the following additional Scriptures will direct our hearts and stimulate our meditation and further understanding of THIS God who is OUR God.

While intellectual arguments can bring us some way towards an understanding and belief in the existence of God, only REVELATION THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WORD OF GOD CAN REALLY TELL US ALL THAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HIM.

Psalm 90; Isaiah 40:12-26; Jeremiah 10:10-16.

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