

CHAPTER 4 THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD

Imagine trying to describe fire to someone who has never seen it or experienced its heat. What does fire look like? What shape does it have? What does it do? These questions will remain unanswered if the person you're teaching has no concept of shape, color, or function. Writing about God entails more difficulty than trying to describe fire to someone with no understanding of it.

What makes God so difficult to write about is that He cannot be seen, touched, or physically analyzed by people on earth. Even the most mature Christians and wisest Bible scholars fall short of adequately describing God. Volumes have been written about God, yet none will ever exhaust such an awesome subject (person). This brief chapter only attempts to introduce a few characteristics of God.

God is unlike any other person or thing, yet He is similar to, though separate from, His creation in certain ways. He has always existed (Exodus 3:14-15). He is unchanging (Malachi 3:6), eternal (Psalm 90:2), personal (Exodus 34:5-7), perfect (Isaiah 55:8), spirit (John 4:24), all-knowing (1 John 3:20), all-wise (Ephesians 3:9-11), faithful (John 17:17), good (Psalm 145:9), holy (Leviticus 11:44-45), righteous (Psalm 145:17), and supreme (1 Chronicles 29:11-12).

Triunity of God

Some religions believe in many gods (pantheism). The Bible teaches, however, that there is only one God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).⁴⁸ He is three persons in one: Father, Son, and Spirit. The three Persons of the triune God equally share the divine nature, but have separate functions.⁴⁹ No one can fully explain the Triunity of God, because it is a mystery.

Read a few of the passages below that teach about the triune God:

There is one God

Deuteronomy 6:4, "*Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*"

The Father is God

Ephesians 1:3, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

The Son is God

Colossians 2:9, "*For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*"

⁴⁸ Also see Mark 12:29-30; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; Galatians 3:20; 1 Timothy 1:18; 2:5; James 2:19.

⁴⁹ Often Christians use the words "Trinity" or "Triunity" or "triune nature" to speak of God; these terms are not found in Scripture, but the concept is taught. For Scripture references dealing with the Triunity of God, see Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 14:16; 15:26; Acts 7:55; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20-21.

The Spirit is God

Acts 5:3-4, *"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . . ? You have not lied to men, but to God.'"*

The Father is not the Son

John 3:16, *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. . . ."*

The Son is not the Spirit

John 14:16, *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper."*

The Spirit is not the Father

John 14:26, *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name. . . ."*

The Father is a Person

Luke 22:42, *"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."*

The Son is a Person

Ephesians 5:25, *"Christ also loved the church."*

The Spirit is a Person

Ephesians 4:30, *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. . . ."*⁵⁰

God the Father

The second word of the Lord's prayer indicates that Jesus thought believers should view God as a Father (Matthew 6:9), a concept reiterated in several Bible passages.⁵¹ He rules with both love and firmness like a good father should. God has created everything, maintains control over creation, and can do whatever He wishes, thus He is called a *Father*.⁵²

⁵⁰ Verses from NASV. Concept based on John Pretlove's 1991 unpublished class notes in Systematic Theology 1 at The Criswell College in Dallas, Texas.

⁵¹ Isaiah 9:6; 63:16; Jeremiah 31:9; Malachi 2:10; Matthew 5:16; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:2.

⁵² Psalm 135:6; Proverbs 16:4, 33; Isaiah 45:7.

God the Son

The Son as a Person

Virgin Birth

Jesus Christ, the second person of the Triune God, had the unique task of coming to earth to provide salvation from sin. God the Son existed prior to His earthly birth and wasn't created or procreated (Micah 5:2).⁵³ Since sexual activity had nothing to do with Jesus' virgin birth, it stands as a miracle.⁵⁴ You might think it impossible for someone to be conceived and born of a virgin, but consider the words in Luke 1:37, "For nothing is impossible with God." If God created everything (Genesis 1:1), then causing a virgin to give birth to Jesus seems simple. Within recent centuries, opponents of the Bible have seriously attacked Jesus' virgin birth, saying it could never have happened. Nevertheless, if you trust Scripture, you cannot deny the virgin birth. While you can't prove it, neither can anyone else disprove it. It takes faith to believe.

Incarnation

The incarnation means God the Son, Jesus, became human. At conception, He was a human embryo, and at birth, He was a human baby. Jesus was not half man and half God. He was fully God and fully man.⁵⁵ He did not have two personalities; He was one person. Nevertheless, Jesus had two natures (e.g., human and divine). You may not understand this completely, but be of good cheer. You dwell in good company--neither does anyone else. Jesus' incarnation, too, stands as a mystery. (Every religion and belief system, including Darwinism, has its mysteries and concepts that are hard to explain. Christianity is most compatible to reality.)

Jesus is God.⁵⁶ In Matthew 1:23, the disciple calls Jesus Immanuel ("God with us") by quoting Isaiah 7:14. Although Jesus' purpose on earth was identical with God the Father's reason for sending Him (John 17:21-22), the Son had a different function than the Father (Luke 22:42). However, Jesus always carried out the will of God (1

⁵³ See Proverb 30:4 and Isaiah 9:6.

⁵⁴ See Matthew 1:18, 20, 23, 25; Luke 1:27, 35.

⁵⁵ Concerning His **humanity**, see John 4:6-7; 11:35; Acts 2:23; 7:56; 13:38; 1 Timothy 2:5. Concerning His **divinity**, see Psalm 2:7; Proverb 30:4; Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:23 [Isaiah 7:14]; 22:42-45; Mark 2:5-7; John 1:1-2; 8:58 [Exodus 3:13-14]; 10:30; 20:28; Acts 2:34, 36; Romans 9:5; 10:9-10, 13 [Joel 2:32]; 2 Corinthians 12:8 [Luke 1:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2-3, 1-10]; Philippians 2:5-11 [Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11]; 4:20; Colossians 1:14-19; 2:9; Titus 2:13 [Isaiah 45:21], 3:4; Hebrews 1:1-5, 7; 2:9-10, 22; Revelation 1:8, 17-18 [Isaiah 44:6]; 5:12-14.

⁵⁶ Luke 1:35; John 10:31; Ephesians 2:18.

Corinthians 3:23; 11:3; 14:28). In other words, Jesus' job on earth was to save those who would believe, and while doing so, He perfectly obeyed the Heavenly Father.

The Son's Work

Crucifixion

The crucifixion refers to Jesus' death on the cross.⁵⁷ The Apostle Paul sometimes spoke of it in positive terms. "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2; also see 1 Corinthians 1:17-25). Paul was not rejoicing in Christ's pain, but celebrating Jesus' accomplishments on the cross.

Because of the Bible's teaching about Jesus' crucifixion and death on the cross, some may accuse Christians of loving pain, agony, and blood. Christians reject sadomasochism, but without Jesus having shed His blood, there would be no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

Jesus' crucifixion offends some people (1 Corinthians 2:14). It offends because Christ's death on the cross indicates humanity's rebellion and need for a Savior (see 1 Corinthians 1:23).

Before a person enters into a relationship with God and understands what Jesus accomplished by dying on the cross, the concept of crucifixion serves as nothing more than a religious reminder of torture and death. But for Christians, the cross represents the point in history where Christ defeated sin and Satan.

Atonement

Christ's atoning work refers to what He did through the cross and resurrection. Jesus Christ, being fully God and fully man, shared the same character or nature with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus lived a sinless life and sacrificed His life in place of those he chose to save.

By doing so, He took on sin's full ramifications, namely, He took the penalty that was rightfully due to humanity when He died on the cross. Jesus appeased God's wrath and purchased select people from sin, thereby declaring them righteous before God.

Propitiation is the technical term for Jesus turning away God's wrath toward sin.⁵⁸ In short, propitiation signifies that Jesus defeated sin and gave you a relationship with God.

Jesus' death on the cross proves how seriously God hates sin. Because of God's holy and just nature, He demands a penalty for sin (Romans 6:23a). Amazingly, He carried out this penalty on Himself (Romans 4:25; Romans 6:23). Only the God-man, Jesus, could give you peace with God.

⁵⁷ Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 20.

⁵⁸ Romans 3:24-26; 1 John 2:2; 4:10. For further references on the atonement, see John 1:29; Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; 3:13; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Hebrews 1:3; 9:22, 28; 10:12; 1 Peter 2:24.

Jesus, your substitute on the cross, took your place and your penalty (Isaiah 53:4-6, 8, 11-12). Jesus was the only human who did not deserve death. He was, therefore, the only Person qualified to die for you and me.⁵⁹

Resurrection

After three days Jesus rose again. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). If there had been no resurrection, there would be no Christianity. In Matthew 26:32 and John 2:19, Jesus predicted His resurrection. Had He not risen, He would have been a liar and all He said would be worthless.

The resurrection is more than a spiritual concept; it stands as a historical event. If you had been there with a video camera, you could have filmed Christ's physical, resurrected body.⁶⁰

Ascension and Return

Christ ascended to heaven from the earth (Acts 1:9). In Acts 1:11, the angels said to the onlookers, ". . . why do you stand gazing into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven" (NKJV).

Some people have tried to place a time and date on Jesus' return, even though Scripture teaches that no one knows when He will come back to earth.⁶¹ Even conservative Christian scholars debate certain details concerning the return of Christ.⁶² Despite various disagreements, true Christianity concurs that Christ will physically come back. Scripture teaches that Jesus will return, and until then, believers have the Spirit dwelling in them.

Summary

God is separate from creation and unlike any thing (or anyone) else in existence, yet He interacts with His creation. There is one God consisting of three Persons--the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus Christ has always existed and is the second Person of the Triune nature of God. He became human while retaining His divinity. He died on the cross and atoned (provided forgiveness) for those who would be saved. Jesus physically rose from the dead on the third day and now sits at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. He shall one day physically return for His followers.

⁵⁹ Concerning Jesus' sinlessness, see John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26-27; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5.

⁶⁰ For other passages on the resurrection, see Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-6; John 11:25-26; 20:1-17; Revelation 1:18.

⁶¹ Matthew 24:36, 42; 25:13; Mark 13:32.

⁶² See chapter 10.

Assignments

1. Memorize 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive by the Spirit." In a few sentences, write out the meaning of this verse.
2. Again in your own words, write what 1 Peter 1:1-2 says about the Triunity of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the phrase *Triunity of God* mean?
2. Does the Bible teach that Jesus was born of a virgin? If so, cite passage(s).
3. Was Jesus half God and half man?
4. Why did Jesus die?
5. What does Christ's atonement mean? (i.e., explain it)
6. What event (and doctrine) serves as the foundation of Christianity?
7. Over what, or whom, did Christ win victory in Colossians 2:14-15 and Hebrews 2:14?

Answers to Chapter 4 Discussion Questions

1. What does the phrase *Triunity of God* mean? *Triunity, or Trinity, refers to the three Persons of the Godhead. There is one God, but He is three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.*
2. Does the Bible teach that Jesus was born of a virgin? *Yes. If so, cite passage(s). Matthew 1:18, 23 is a good place to begin.*
3. Was Jesus half God and half man? *No. Christianity believes that Jesus was fully God and fully man, not some quasi-mixture of the two.*
4. Why did Jesus die? *Jesus died on the cross to deal with humanity's sin debt. He died to atone for His elect, to bring them into a right relationship with God the Father, so God would receive all the glory due His name.*
5. What does Christ's atonement mean? (i.e., explain it). *Atonement indicates Christ paying for a sin debt. He cleansed believing sinners and brought them into unity with God the Father.*
6. What event (and doctrine) serves as the foundation of Christianity? *According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection of Christ is the groundwork on which all of Christianity stands. Without it, believers would be miserable for trying to follow Christ.*
7. Over what, or whom, did Christ win victory in Colossians 2:14-15 and Hebrews 2:14? *Jesus won victory over sin and Satan.*