

The Sure Word Bible Studies *Lesson 3*

What God Is Really Like

We have read in our first lesson that Jesus said that God's Word is truth we can depend upon. But in the second lesson we learned that Satan has accused God before the universe of being arbitrary and untrustworthy. We saw that men and women in this world are caught up in this conflict and have to decide who is really being honest with us. The good news is that God has answered the accusations of Satan by sending His Son to reveal His true character and to show us what He is really like. In the next two lessons we will look to the Bible to get a better understanding of God and what He wants from us.

We begin with the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Throughout the first chapter of Genesis, "God" is translated from the Old Testament Hebrew word "elohim," which means "gods," plural. The concept of God being more than one person is seen throughout the Bible beginning with the creation story.

Genesis 1:26 *"Then God (The Hebrew is Elohim, "gods," plural) said, "let us (plural) make man in our (plural) image according to our (plural) likeness"*

Note that all the references to God in this verse are plural. Later in the Old Testament book of Isaiah we see God in three persons implied in a prophecy concerning the Messiah or the Christ to come:

Isaiah 42:1 *"Behold! My Servant (1 - Christ) whom I (2 - the Father) uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit (3 - Holy Spirit) upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."*

In the New Testament book of John we find more evidence of three persons who make up what is referred to as the "Trinity."

John 14:26 *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit (one), whom the Father (two) will send in My name (Christ, three), He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

Note in this verse Christ specifically names the "Father" and the "Holy Spirit" making it clear He considers them persons as himself. Also note that He refers to the Holy Spirit as an "He" and not an "it" making it clear that the Spirit is not some impersonal force but a real person.

The Bible also describes God as being all-knowing, all-powerful and being everywhere at once. That is just too much for humans with our limited abilities to

comprehend. So in order to help us grasp the greatness of God, each of the three persons of the Trinity have voluntarily taken specific, limited "roles" that we, unable to see God ourselves, can better understand and relate to Him and His activities.

Remember when we refer to the three persons of the Trinity as the "first," "second," or "third" person, it is a means of distinguishing them from one another and in no way is meant to assign them positions of rank as they are all equal.

The Father is the first person. He has the role of the Almighty God seated on the heavenly throne ruling over and directing the affairs of the entire universe. Nothing happens without His knowledge and permission and because of this great responsibility the Father never leaves the throne.

I Corinthians 8:6 *"Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live."*

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

Revelation 3:21 *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

The Son is the second person – His role is seen as the embodiment or the exact image of the Father God with whom He, as God himself, shares the throne.

Hebrews 1:1 - 3 *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,"*

The Son is the "express image," or the embodiment of God. Since the Father is seen as continually on the throne, the Son is seen as the One who moves and lives among God's creatures that they can better understand what God is really like. The Son lived and walked among the angels and later came to earth and lived and walked among men. He was "Emmanuel," which means, "God with us."

The Holy Spirit is the third person - His role is to reach the hearts of men with the truth. The Bible teaches that God is also ever present, everywhere at the same time. King David wrote in the Psalms:

Psalms 139:7 - 10 *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You*

are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me."

We are better able to comprehend this ability through the work of the third person, the Holy Spirit. Even though God is all powerful, He prefers to use the power of the truth spoken to the human heart softly in love. *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord"* (Zechariah 4:6). This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Today the Father continually reigns on the throne of the universe, the Son is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary (later lesson) and the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts and minds of men and women throughout the world.

Even though the three members of the Trinity have taken these different roles, they are the same. Note the words of Jesus in the following text -

John 14:8 - 9 *"Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

Jesus said if you have seen me you have seen the Father. That's the same as saying, if you've seen Me you've seen God, we are the same. Jesus then added -

John 14:15,16 *"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever"*

The Greek word for "another" is "allos" which means "another of the same kind." In other words Jesus is saying, *"I am exactly like the Father, and the Spirit is exactly like Me - We are all the same!"* All three persons of the Godhead are fully, equally, and eternally God! Since they are all the same, that means that they all love us the same and are all working together for our salvation. This is the Father's plan, carried out by the Son, impressed on our hearts by the Spirit, and witnessed by the angels.

Wherever you see the title "Father" or "Son" or "Holy Spirit," you can replace it with the word "God." But no one word or name can describe the Infinite and Almighty God - therefore He is known by many names.

Isaiah 9:6 *"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Note in this verse all the names listed for God apply to the Son just as to the other members of the Trinity. But the scriptures teach that Son has a prominent role in relation to this world. In the following texts, we see the Son in His role as Creator.

John 1:1 *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and*

without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Verse 14 *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*

Ephesians 3:9 *"and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ."*

Colossians 1:16 - 18 *"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church,"*

Not only is the Son the Creator as confirmed in the previous passages, but biblical evidence shows that He is also the Lord God of the Old Testament as well as the Lord Jesus in the New. Read carefully the following passage:

Nehemiah 9:6 - 15 *"You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You. You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram, And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, And gave him the name Abraham; You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give the land of the Canaanites, The Hittites, the Amorites, The Perizzites, the Jebusites, And the Girgashites-- To give it to his descendants. You have performed Your words, For You are righteous. You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea. You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants, And against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as it is this day. And You divided the sea before them, So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; And their persecutors You threw into the deep, As a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar, And by night with a pillar of fire, To give them light on the road Which they should travel. "You came down also on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, And told them to go in to possess the land Which You had sworn to give them."*

According to this passage the Son is the member of the Trinity through whom God created the earth. The Son is also the One who led the Israelites through the wilderness and gave the law on Mt Sinai. The Son, the Christ, is the Lord God in the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ in the New. The Apostle Peter may have had this in mind when he said:

Acts 4:10 - 12 *"Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

And the Apostle Paul when he wrote in **I Timothy 2:5** *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

There is *"One mediator (intermediary or connector) between God and men."* It's not the Father - He remains on the throne. It's not the Holy Spirit - He's the Helper living in the heart. The mediator is the Son. He is the link between heaven and earth; this has been His role from the beginning.

Isaiah 63:7,8 *"I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD And the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, "Surely they are My people, Children who will not lie." So He became their Savior."*

We can't go up to heaven to God – God must come down to us, and the Son did that as Creator and Savior. Christ is God and Savior in both the Old and New Testaments! Yet in spite of all this, some may still see the Old Testament God as the Father, but which ever way one may see it, both the Father and the Son are God with identical characters and purposes so no matter which role they take, nothing would happen differently. Jesus said it plainly:

John 10:30 *"I and My Father are one."*

John 16:26,27 *"In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you."*

Jesus came to show us that God the Father loves us just as much, is just as kind and tender, just as loving and compassionate, just as merciful and forgiving as Jesus. If the Father had come instead of the Son it would have all happened just the same as it did.

The religions that don't accept Jesus as God and One with the Father, have a difficult time understanding God's true character. Rejecting the New Testament, they focus on the wrath of God they see in the Old Testament and God the Father is thus understood as arbitrary, rigid and severe. As a result they also become rigid and severe in their treatment of others! This is the picture of God that motivates the terrorists!

But since we now understand the God of the Old Testament was not the Father but the Son, we might ask, "How could Christ Jesus do some of those dreadful things we read about God doing in the Old Testament?" Hebrews 13:8 says *"Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever."* And that's true, God never changes – but people do. Note the following text.

Hebrews 8:7,8 *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel"*

There was no problem with God's covenant, the problem was the people. Back in the book of Genesis we read about a drastic loss of the knowledge of God. The descendants of Jacob (Israel) migrated to Egypt where they became enslaved for hundreds of years. When the time came for Moses to deliver the Israelites, their spiritual condition was very poor. Many of them had forgotten the God who had revealed Himself to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The children of Israel came out of bondage contaminated with the pagan gods of Egypt and they gave Moses a very difficult time. God called them *"stiff-necked."* The Hebrew word is "qasheh," meaning: hard, cruel, severe and hard headed. God could not have sent Jesus to preach the Sermon on the Mount to those hard hearted, rebellious people. They weren't ready to hear things like love your enemies and do good to them. They would not have listened to a God who said things like that. Therefore God had to do some drastic things to reach them and to keep them with Him until they could learn the truth. The pagan gods seemed very real to them and they were always on the verge of deserting the "new" God of Moses for the old familiar gods of Egypt.

It is important that we realize that for God to tell them about Satan and his power at this time would only put them in danger of worshipping Satan in addition to the pagan gods. So the first step that God asked His people to take as they traveled in the wilderness was simply - *"Have no Gods before me - worship the God who brought you out of Egypt"* (Exodus 20:2,3). The knowledge about the existence of Satan would have to come later when their faith in the true God was more stable. And because the ancient peoples were unaware of the existence of Satan, God himself took the blame for both good and evil. Note what the Lord said to Isaiah:

Isaiah 45:6,7 *"That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things."*

In portraying Himself in this way God was meeting the Israelites where they were in hopes that one day they would come to see that He was the true God and there really is no other, then they would abandon the pagan gods and be willing to listen to and follow only Him. We can see more evidence of this in the story of Job.

Job 2:1 - 10 *"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause." So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips."*

Who brought all the evil calamities upon Job? Who smote him with boils? Clearly it was Satan. But who got the blame? God. Why? Because in those days they were unaware of Satan's existence and God did not see it wise to tell them about Satan at that time knowing they couldn't handle that kind of knowledge.

That is likely the reason the Bible rarely mentions Satan in the Old Testament where the name "*Satan*" is found in only 15 verses of 4 books. The New Testament is some better, but there "*Satan*" is only mentioned in only 34 verses of 12 books. In fact, in the 31,173 verses in the entire Bible - the word "*Satan*" is found in only 49. All the biblical references to Satan under all his various names only add up to little over one hundred. On the other hand, the name "*God*" is found in 3,876 verses, and "*Lord*" in 6,668 verses of the Bible. It is clear the Lord is much more interested in revealing Himself than His adversary, Satan.

Because of this in the minds of people in Bible times, including many of those who wrote the scriptures, it was thought that if a woman was barren, it was because God had closed her womb - If a woman had a baby, God had opened her womb - If a nation came up against another nation - God sent them - If a man dies - God killed him. God was seen as being responsible for everything, good and bad. We see this is thinking reflected in many biblical accounts. One example of this is in the story of the death of King Saul.

I Chronicles 10:3 - 5 *"The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died."*

This clearly says that Saul killed himself by falling on his sword. But note what was written a few verses later -

Verse 13 - 14 *"So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. But he did not inquire of the LORD; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse."*

Did God kill King Saul, or did the King commit suicide? This is an apparent contradiction which we must think through to a logical conclusion. Clearly by falling on his sword King Saul killed himself, but as we noted, in the minds of many of the writers of scripture, God is responsible for the good and the bad, and they wrote it that way just as the writer did in this story.

Having looked at that, it is also true that in some of the "emergency situations" of those days it is apparent that God did have a hand in dreadful things; like the Flood, putting to death the first born of Egypt and drowning the Egyptian army in the Red Sea for example. But in reading these stories written long ago, it would be a mistake for us to think that the way God reacted in the emergency situations of those ancient days is the way He is all the time; to think that it is His nature to be wrathful and judgmental. We need to realize that God, just as any loving parent, though they hate doing it, has to do some difficult and painful things at times in order to properly train up a child, but the goal is always the good of the child. And you can be sure God hated doing many of those awful things we read about as well, but they had to be done for the overall good. The Old Testament nation of Israel, though they were "stiff-necked," were the only people in the entire world who acknowledged God at all; they were all He had! And because many of them were rebellious and hard headed, God had to do many difficult things or lose the entire human race and God loved us too much for that.

In the knowledge of this, before we draw any conclusions about God's character or actions, it is important that we examine all the scriptures as a whole and as we do we will find that when all is said and done, God is good, all the time! Throughout the Bible we not only have the record of those difficult things, also overwhelming evidence of God's goodness. The Bible is not to be seen as a code book of deeds to be done and sins to be shun. The Bible is history or has someone pointed out, it is His - Story. It is a written account of God's dealings and interactions with rebellious man as seen through the eyes of fallible human beings who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to record it.

The Bible tells us when the time was right God sent His Son to clear all these things up and demonstrate in undeniable ways what God is really like.

John 3:16,17 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not*

send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Galatians 4:4 *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,"*

Jesus shows us exactly what God is like in a way that everyone, both young and old can understand. That is what we all need to see and we see it perfectly in Jesus.

As Jesus said, *"I and My Father are one"* (John 10:30) and *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9).

It is important to study the life and teachings of Jesus because, *"We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."* (II Corinthians 3:18)

By "beholding" Jesus we will become like Him and one day it may be said of us, *"as He is so are we in this world."* (I John 4:17)

So the answer to our question, What is God really like? Is this - God is just like Jesus! If you've seen Jesus, you've seen God! That is awesome!! This is the good news! This is the true, the everlasting gospel. This fact we must always keep in mind as we continue our study of the scriptures.

Did you know that God really wants to be your friend? Next lesson.

Response Questions;

1. I understand the God of the Bible includes three persons in their distinctive roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yes ___ No ___
2. I understand the three persons which make up the Trinity are the same in character and purpose. Yes ___ No ___
3. I believe the good news is that God the Father is just like Jesus! Yes ___ No ___