

Doctrine of God – MTC3 August 2013 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 their god?
- How does Elijah pray? What does that tell you about his God?
- What does the way we pray tell people about our God?

The question is not “Do you believe in God?” the question is “Which god or gods do you believe in?” Everyone is a believer, everyone is religious, everyone is worshipping something or someone, probably multiple things – we are naturally polytheistic.

It’s also a question of “Who do you mean by ‘God’?” - Either we have things as gods (prosperity, football, popularity, technology etc.) or we have a false idea of who God is – and that’s the more subtle one – who is this ‘God’ we’re talking about?

The Omni-being:

- Omnipotent
- Omniscient
- Omnipresent

The problem with an approach to the doctrine of God which is just about a collection of attributes (the omni-s):

1. Dry and boring – God is not boring!
2. Abstract idea versus person
3. Atemporal versus story – in many ways when you ask ‘Who is God?’ the Bible 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

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 1:15-20

- 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?
- What do you learn here about Jesus? (v16-20) Is this how you normally think about him?

¹ Throughout this paper I am very largely 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](#).

- “Imagine if you made heaven and earth. Imagine if you were the operating system for the whole universe. 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 surprise of v20?
- Since Jesus is revealing the invisible God, how does his life and death reshape our view of what *God* is like?

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 made known?

Matthew 11:27 – how do we know the Father?

John 14:6-10 – how do we see the Father?

2 Cor. 4:6 – how do we know the glory of God?

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 and drinking, suffering, bleeding – 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 to read it as all about Him (e.g. John 12:24)
- What about philosophy? Futile (Romans 1:21); not the way (1 Cor. 20-21)
- What about other religions? Idolatry (Romans 1:25) Important because 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.)
- What about in the Old Testament? The LORD speaking and saving and being trusted in the OT *was Jesus* (e.g. 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)

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

² Glen Scrivener, Colossians 1:15-23 sermon.

- **How does this change the way we do evangelism and apologetics – with atheists, with nominal ‘Christians’, with Muslims?**

3. The overflowing Trinity

Start with Jesus and he introduces us to the Trinity – Luke 3:22 – he is the Son of the Father and the anointed-with-the-Spirit-one

Problem is we tend to start with idea of omni-being and try to fit that with the Trinity. We need to replace the omni-being with the Trinity.

Not a riddle or maths problem it’s great news because:

- God is happy, joyful, loving community – John 17:24 – if he’s a policeman then you’ll just want to avoid him or give him kitu kidogo to pay him off – this is a God you want to be around
- Creation and salvation and all God’s works are overflows of this love
Richard Sibbes: “God’s goodness is a communicative, spreading goodness. . . . If God did not have a communicative, spreading goodness, he would never have created the world. The Father, Son and Spirit were happy in themselves and enjoyed one another before the world was. If it were not for the fact that God delights to communicate and spread his goodness, there had never been a creation nor a redemption. God uses his creatures not because he can do nothing without them, but for the spreading of his goodness.”
– everything is a gift, it’s all Top Down – human religion is all about giving things to God – giving money, giving my life – and maybe he’ll give me something back - but look at 1 John 4:8-10 – The triune God is an outpouring, overflowing, missional God and we are on the *receiving* end of that
- There can be true unity and equality and diversity all at the same time:
There is submission and hierarchy at the same time as equality and love – do you see that in human organisations?
Genesis 2:24 – first use of ‘one’ in the Bible – a great visual aid of the trinity – two persons, equal but different are One, the husband’s body is the wife’s the wife’s is the husband’s, the husband in love gives himself to his wife, the wife in love gives herself to her husband, different roles, equal status, one flesh
- We’re swept up into the trinity!

Read Galatians 3:23-4:7

1. Who are we ‘in’, who are we clothed with, who do we belong to? (3:23-29)
2. Who is in our hearts? What is he doing? (4:6)
3. How do the Father and the Son and the Spirit relate to one another? (4:6)
4. What does it look like for us to be swept up into the trinity?

Notice the entry to the Trinity is the Son.

You go to Christ and he introduces you to the Trinity

- **If God is eternally *giving, overflowing*, what is “godliness”, “faith”, “sin”, the Christian life?**