

# **EQTH105 Basic Bible Doctrine**

## **Unit 6a What Is God Like?**

Presented by the



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Hello and welcome back. As we wrap up this study about basic Bible doctrines and our exploration of the great truths of our Christian faith, it's probably a good time to circle back around to where we started and dive into questions about the identity of God. Who is he? What is he like? Can we get to know him? Well, we can answer that last question about getting to know him because we have a great deal of knowledge about him. Not complete, mind you, but a lot. Our knowledge of the God of the Bible is derived from four sources: nature, the spirit and mind of humanity, the Bible, and the person of Jesus Christ. From these sources, we can have a basic picture of the nature of God. While it is difficult to condense the infinite into a simple explanation of God, we can take a stab at it by giving nine basic descriptions of what God is like.

First, God's nature is that of a spirit. God's form is that of a spirit. He is an invisible, eternal spirit. That means that God does not have a body. However, God can reveal himself to humanity in a physical form. The Old Testament does tell us that on certain occasions, God has temporarily revealed himself to humankind in visible form. In the New Testament, God came to earth through the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus was God in human flesh. However, by nature, God is a spirit. Because he is an invisible spirit, it's impossible to make any picture of him that is accurate.

Second, he is the eternal God. He has always existed and he will always exist. There has never been a time when God did not exist, nor will there ever come a time when he will not exist. He has no beginning, and he will have no end. Now, third, we take that step a little further. He is not only the eternal God; he is the only God that exists. There is no other god either more or less powerful who exists anywhere in the universe. The prophet Isaiah records God saying, "To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?" [Isa 40:25] Fourth, he is absolutely perfect. God is total and complete perfection. There is nothing lacking in his character or nature. He does not need anything or anyone to exist. He is complete within himself. He is therefore the perfect eternal spirit.

Fifth, the God of the Bible is a personal God. Now, think about that for a moment. The opposite of personal is impersonal, something that is faceless, soulless, anonymous, unknowable. But God is not impersonal. He is personal. This means that he has intelligence, will, emotion, and self-cognizance. Personal names are used when referring to him. Personal characteristics are also attributed to him. He is not some vague creative force that has no mind or feelings. Sixth, God is distinct from his creation. Now, it's very common both in antiquity and in pantheism today to equate God with nature. It's a little trite, but it's like that margarine commercial perhaps you've seen where they say, "It's not nice to fool Mother Nature." Now, the universe is not God, nor is the universe part of God. God is distinct from his creation. When the universe was created, God brought something into existence that had not existed before.

Seventh, God is not like humans, but humans are like God. In the very beginning of the creation account, we read where God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." [Gen 1:26-28] You may remember that verse from a previous lesson about the Trinity.

But the point in this context is that God created mankind in his image. Now, by the way, the corollary truth is this as well: Humans are made in God's image, but God is separate from his created beings. Now, true, when you become a born again Christian, you will have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in you. But that is not the same as the popular theology of a movie series that alludes to some deistic force that is in all living beings. But that theology is a subject for another day.

Number seven [sic actually eight], God is personally involved in the universe. In Isaiah, we read, "The Lord of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand." [Isa 14:24] There is a worldview that basically believes that God created the world, but then he's just let go. This is called deism, which is a belief in the existence of a supreme being, specifically a creator who does not intervene in the universe. This belief came from the philosophy of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that accepted the existence of a creator on the basis of reason, but rejected belief in a supernatural deity who interacts with mankind. But Job answers this when he says, "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind." [Job 12:10] Now, those are the characteristics of a God that is personally involved in the running of the universe. He did not merely create the universe and then leave it on its own.

But let's drill this down a little further. God not only cares about the universe. He deeply cares about each one of us. He told Isaiah, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." [Isa 41:10] That sounds very personal. So we have a very clear picture of a God who is personally and intimately involved. Number eight [sic, actually nine], we have the picture of a God that is not only knowable; he wants us to know him. He went to great lengths to reveal truths about himself to us. This indeed is the good news of Scripture. It is possible to have a personal relationship with the creator of the universe.

So we have a description of what God is like, but I would like to dig a little deeper into this topic of personal knowledge of God. This is such a central belief of our faith that the living God can be known by humankind. In fact, God does go out of his way to have a personal relationship with human beings. Now, true, we will never arrive at a complete understanding of God, not in this life anyway. But in that, Scripture reveals two truths about God. First, because of who he is, we cannot completely understand him. This is spoken of as God being incomprehensible, that no one can fully understand him. Scripture asks the question, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" [Job 11:17] That's in the Book of Job. But it's almost as if several hundred years later, the prophet Isaiah answers him when he says, "To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?" [Isa 40:18]

So the bottom line is that although we cannot know everything about him, we can know some things about him. The Bible says that God is knowable. And indeed, the whole purpose of this course is to learn more about God, about his attributes and his thoughts and his commands. Jesus said, “If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” [John 14:7] John said in his gospel, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” [John 17:3] Later on, he wrote in his letter that “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 even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” [1Jo 5:20]

So we have this very clear picture of God who is the creator of the universe and is all-powerful and incomparable, but also that he is knowable. We may not know everything about him, but he has revealed enough about himself so that we can understand some things about his character. Furthermore, individuals can have a personal relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. And this is part of the believer’s journey that each day that goes by, we know more about him and are being transformed into the image of Christ.

Paul prayed for God to increase our knowledge of him in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote, “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” [Phl 1:9-11] He also wrote, “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” [Col 1:9-10]

I’d like to explore a little deeper this process of getting to know God better because here’s the rub. Since the very beginning of time, mankind has been devising his own way of getting to know God, and that way always leads to calamity. This is the very essence of the fall where Adam and Eve thought they could be like God and they ate the fruit. Cain thought that he would devise his own way to God through a grain offering. Nimrod thought he could build a tower to God and reach him that way. The truth is that God himself is our only source of knowledge about him. Nature can be misunderstood. Our human reason is inadequate. And experience can be misleading. It’s only through the truth of biblical revelation that we can hope to learn the truth of who God is. It will be incomplete, but it is the revealed knowledge of God.

Now, it’s possible to know facts about God without knowing him personally. Anybody can know facts about God, but that is not the same thing as knowing God. God revealed facts about himself so that human beings can have a personal experience with him. With that personal experience comes some additional assistance. God has given the Holy Spirit to help believers. Paul, again, tells us, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” [1Co 2:9-10] So if we have an ear to hear and be guided, the Holy Spirit helps believers distinguish truth from error.

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.” [1Jo 2:27]

So what are some of the things we will know about God through the Bible? And here is where people get an incomplete understanding of God: when they believe that all God cares about is a list of do's and don'ts. Well, it's not all God cares about, but it is something that he does have a few things to say about. There are many commands in Scriptures which believers are expected to obey and believers are held responsible to obey. In Psalms, we read, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Happy are those who take refuge in him!” [Psa 34:8] Now, this lesson is about knowing God and not a deep study of his commands, so I'll stop there. But part of knowing God is knowing the things that he cares about and knowing the things that he wants us to do or not do.

It's an interesting thing. People have always had the desire to know God. In the very first book of the Bible, in the chronology of when they were written is the Book of Job, and there we read a familiar theme. “If only I knew where to find God; if only I could go to his dwelling!” [Job 23:3] Well, the Bible is clear that a personal knowledge of God is possible. However, before one can know God, there are a few things that must happen. First, a person must confront the need for God. For a person to know God, they first must feel that need. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” [Mat 5:6] The prophet Jeremiah wrote about Israel, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.” [Jer 29:13] But then once a person realizes the need, the next step is to act on that need in an exercise of faith. It is only by faith that a person can know God. The writer to the Hebrews stated, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” [Heb 11:6]

So God is knowable. He exists as a spirit in a place we can't understand, but we can understand his commands and obey him. Knowing the living God is the greatest thing that a human can experience. To begin with, a human will want to know God. After that, they must come to God in faith. It must be an intentional and active step in a person's life. And then as we continue in faith, we grow in our knowledge of him.