



## WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

### QUEST LESSON A-3

The Problem: Throughout the history of mankind there have been many different ideas concerning what God is like. In the ancient world, as in some primitive societies today, there were people who believed in the existence of many gods. The polytheism of ancient Greece and Rome is well known. By contrast, the ancient Israelites believed in only one God. Their monotheistic faith, one of the remarkable features of the ancient world, brought them into direct conflict with the religions of other nations. The Psalmist wrote, "For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens" (Psalm 96:5). Jacob urged his household to put away "strange gods that are among you, and be clean" (Genesis 35:2). And Jeremiah was instructed to proclaim, "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens" (Jeremiah 10:11).

When Jesus began His ministry and claimed to be God equal with God the Father, this posed a problem for the monotheistic faith of Israel. "Are there two God's," people asked. When Jesus said that He would return by the Holy Spirit and instruct His followers (John 14:18), Christians questioned how that could be. Now it seemed there were three Gods, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Some early Christians solved the problem by teaching that only the Father is the eternal, all-powerful God. They said that Christ was brought into existence by the Father, and sent to our world to save sinners. They argued that He has been exalted to the position of Deity, but He is not the supreme God of the universe. They thought the Holy Spirit is the name given in the Scriptures for God's powerful influence upon mankind. The Holy Spirit, they said, is not a personality, and not God. He is only God's divine influence on people's lives.

The leading teacher of these views was Arius, a Presbyter (priest) in Alexandria, who began teaching about A.D. 318. His teaching is called Arianism. The Christian Church generally became so upset with Arius and his teaching that the Council of Nicaea was convened in A.D. 325, and Arianism was condemned as false doctrine.

Another view that was held in the early Christian Church was that God can change His form. God the Father, some second century said, assumed a different form when He became the Son. And by taking a third form He manifests Himself as the Holy Spirit. In this way they tried to preserve the idea that there is only one God.

Others asserted that this was not quite correct, that what really happened was that the man Jesus was a great prophet who at His baptism was adopted by the heavenly Father, and later exactly to the position of God. He always remains inferior to the supreme Father, but we should honor Him and worship Him.

The Christian Church generally rejected the idea of three Gods, the teachings of Arius, the concept that God takes on various forms, and the notion that Jesus was adopted into the Godhead. Christians generally concluded that there is only one God, but this one God includes three separate personalities. The three personalities are so mysteriously bound together that it is true to say that there is only one God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they said, are each supreme God, but they are so united into One that monotheism is still true. No-one professed to be able to explain this teaching fully, because the nature of God is a mystery which mankind can never fully grasp.

Our concern is to discover what the Bible teaches. Are there three Gods or One? Was Jesus fully God equal with the Father? Did Jesus exist always in the eternal ages before our world was created, or was He, as the Arians still say, brought into existence by the Father? Is the Holy Spirit a personality and is He supreme Deity also? What the Bible says we believe. What does the Bible say about what God is like?

## Objectives

First, we will let the bible answer the question: How many God's are there?

Second, it is necessary to consider what the Bible says about the Deity of Christ.

Third, we will study the subject of the personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the question will be answered: What special characteristics does God possess?

Fifth, we will show how the infinite love and mercy of God are the answer to all our need.

### I. How Many God's Are There?

Both Old and New Testaments are very clear that there is only one God. The Bible writers were monotheists.

## The Word

1. How did Moses express the confidence of Israel in their one God? Deuteronomy 6:4; 4:35.
2. How many God's did Jesus believe in? Mark 12:29.
3. How many God's did the apostles say there are? 1 Corinthians 8:4; Ephesians 4:5-6, James 2:19.
4. How many Creators were there? Malachi 2:10.

Explanation: Whatever else the Bible says on the nature of God, it will not contradict the first principle that there is only one Deity. Christians are not polytheists. They do not believe in three Gods. We are confronted by infinite mystery when we come to study the nature of God, because he is infinite, and our little human minds can never understand His greatness. Even so, there are a few truths on this subject which are very clearly revealed. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Relevance: We are not asked to relate to a number of gods whose natures and ideas are in conflict. When we find God we have found the eternal One who is willing to share His goodness with us.

### II. The Deity of Christ

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He is equal with the Father in authority and power, and mysteriously One with the Father. He is not another God, or an inferior God, but supreme Deity, He is so bound to the Father in nature and attributes that to know Him is to know the Father. Jesus and the Father are separate personalities who, in a very mysterious way, comprise one God.

## The Word

5. Who did Jesus declare Himself to be? John 10:30-33, 39; 8:58; 5:18.

6. How much of Deity could Jesus claim to be His? Colossians 2:9; (compare 1 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1-3, 14; 20:28; Titus 2:13).

Note: In the Old Testament, God is called Yahweh (Hebrew). Usually in the King James Version the name is translated into English as "Lord" (Exodus 3:13-15). Sometimes it is translated "Jehovah" (Exodus 6:3). Yahweh is usually considered to be a form of the verb "to be." It means, "the Eternal One," "the Existent One," "the Self-existing One."

7. Is Jesus Christ known as Yahweh ("Lord" or "Jehovah")?
  - a. Compare Isaiah 40:3 with Matthew 3:3:
  - b. Compare Isaiah 8:13-14 with 1 Peter 2:7-8:
  - c. Compare Zechariah 12:1, 10 with John 19:37:
  - d. Compare Isaiah 6:5 with John 12:41:
8. What was Christ's part in creation? John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:3.
9. How long had Christ existed before coming to our world? Micha 5:2; (compare Hebrews 7:3; Revelation 1:17-18; 22:13).

Explanation: When Jesus declared Himself to be the "I AM" (John 8:58), He was taking the name of the eternal God, Yahweh, for Himself. (See Exodus 3:14-15). He is not part of the Deity, but "the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossian 2:9). The Yahweh or Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Christ of the New Testament. Therefore, Christ is the self-existent, eternal God.

When the New Testament speaks of Jesus being exalted by the Father, it simply means that after His resurrection, He was restored to His former position in heaven as supreme Lord, with the privilege again of exercising his prerogatives, as the One equal with the father. (See Philippians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3, 8).

Relevance: When you worship Jesus Christ you are worshipping the supreme God of the universe. When He comes to you (John 14:18), and takes charge of your life, you are controlled and directed by the eternal Deity. When you pray to Jesus you are praying to the everlasting God. (See Philippians 2:9-11). It was God who came in the form of a man and died on Calvary's Cross for us. There are many mysteries involved, but the Scriptural message is clear. Our Savior and Lord is the preeminent God of all (Revelation 19:16).

### III. Who Is The Holy Spirit?

The questions for which we are seeking an answer are: IS the Holy Spirit a Person, or a mere influence? Is the Holy Spirit also God? Is He some kind of inferior God, or One with the Father and the Son?

#### The Word

10. What evidence do we have that the Holy Spirit has intellect? John 16:13; 14:26.
11. How do we know that the Holy Spirit makes decisions, and exercises a will? 1 Corinthians 12:11; Acts 16:6-7.
12. How do we know that the Holy Spirit is capable of emotion? Acts 15:28; Ephesians 4:30; Isaiah 63:10.
13. In what words did Peter identify the Holy Spirit as God? Acts 5:3-4.
14. Is the Holy Spirit also identified as Yahweh ("Lord" or "Jehovah")? Isaiah 63:10-14 (compare Numbers 14:11; Deuteronomy 32:12); 2 Samuel 23:2-3; Ezekiel 8:1, 3; Acts 28:25 (compare Luke 1:68-70); Luke 1:35.
15. What was the Holy Spirit's role in creation? Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 40:12-13; Job 26:13; Psalm 104:30.
16. How long has the Holy Spirit been in existence? Hebrews 9:14.

Explanation: The Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit has the fundamental characteristics of personality: intellect, will, and emotion. He is a Spirit Person who lives mysteriously in the hearts of believers. He is not a mere influence, but a divine Person. He is identified as God, Lord, Yahweh. And, like Christ, He is referred to as the Creator.

Thus we conclude that the doctrine of the trinity is taught by the Bible. Our one God comprises the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that each of the three Persons is one third of the Godhead. We have the very mysterious truth that each of the Persons is “the fullness of the Godhead” (Colossians 2:9). When Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30), and “I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (John 14:11), He was stating a truth which is unexplainable by mortals. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in one another in such a way that it is true to say there there is only one God.

The writers of the Bible were montheistic Trinitarians. They believed in one God who includes three Persons.

Relevance: The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life is the presence of the Father and the Son. Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).

#### IV. What Special Characteristics Does God Possess?

The same characteristics are possessed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

##### The Word

17. What does the Bible say about God’s power? Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 28:18; Romans 15:19.

18. How much knowledge does God have? Psalm 147:5; John 16:30; 1 Corinthians 2:10-12.

19. To what extent does God have the ability to be in different places at the same time? Psalm 139:7-8; Proverbs 15:3; Jeremiah 23:24.

Explanation: The Bible message is that God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (everywhere at once). These ideas are too infinite for our minds to grasp, but they are truths nonetheless.

Relevance: Our God is so great and powerful that we can trust His protection and guidance at all times. In fact, it is unreasonable not to trust a Lord who knows so much. He always knows what is best for us.

#### V. God’s Infinite Love

An infinitely powerful being who did not love others would be someone to fear. Our God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) loves so infinitely that He was prepared to suffer intensely to save us from sin and eternal death.

##### The Word

20. How does the Bible describe the love of God? John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:1; Ephesians 5:2.

21. What does God’s love do for us? 1 John 4:7-21.

Explanation: The love of God is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5). Because Jesus died for us we can receive His love into our minds, and this be filled with love for God and

man. Here is the greatest power in the universe. An all-powerful Creator, whose presence fills heaven and earth, loves us, His creatures, so much that He was willing to endure infinite agony to save us. Moreover, He promises to dwell within us, so that the divine life and love fill our souls. We are “partakes of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4). We become “partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

Relevance: To receive His wonderful loving presence into your life, He asks that you believe in Him. “And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23). Now believing in such a loving, powerful Savior is not difficult at all. When you realize His love for you, your heart responds, and you want to know Him better and receive more of His divine attributes.

Do you respond with love to God as you consider His love for you? Are you willing to place your life wholly in His hands, so that the very best can be done for you that a loving God can do?

### Review Questions

1. True or False
  - a. There are many real living gods, as history proves.
  - b. Christ is supreme Deity.
  - c. The Holy Spirit is only God’s influence.
  - d. God exists, but He really does not interfere much in the life of man.
2. Discuss: Since the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God in the fullest sense, those people who say that He is inferior to the Father, and that the Father brought Him into existence, must be incorrect.