



BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH PART 2 : "Understanding God" June 5, 2005 Study 4 : "The Incomprehensible God"

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

"Building Blocks of Faith" is a Series of basic Christian beliefs. The studies will be kept as simple as possible. Those who are considering following Jesus will have the main issues of the Christian Faith explained. New Christians will gain an insight into what God has done in their life ... and why. Older Christians need to revisit the basics from time to time in order to check that what they are building is consistent with the blueprints!

TODAY'S STUDY

... is the first of two on "Understanding God." These two Studies belong together as indispensable parts of a whole. Either of the Studies in isolation from the other will present a misleading picture of God - so be sure that you catch up with both sets of notes.

INTRODUCTION TO TODAY'S STUDY_

"Understanding God" the title is in some ways presumptuous :

"Who can understand God?" - See Is40:12-17; Job 38 & 39

An Atheist dogmatically believes that there is no God. I have little personal sympathy with this position because it ignores the evidence and requires even more faith than needed to maintain Christian belief.

On the other hand, I have great sympathy with the Agnostic who says that if there is a God, he cannot be known. (By the end of this Study, the Atheist and I will seem to be in agreement! But wait, yes there is more! By the end of the 2nd Study we will have most definitely parted company.)

In these two Studies I am going to propose two contradictory positions :

1. God is so REMOVED from us that he cannot be known. ... and at the same time :
2. God, in Jesus Christ, is so NEAR us that he can be known.

No, I'm not playing foolish word games or seeking to be provocative without good reason. After these two Study's, from the Scriptures, we will hold strongly to two vital concepts about God. And we will see illustrated an important principle - that truth itself is most fully comprehended when our minds are stretched across a seeming contradiction.

A. TWO CONCEPTS ... AND JESUS

Let me introduce two concepts and illustrate them by seeing how people reacted to Jesus.

CONCEPT 1 : God Is TRANSCENDENT : he is infinitely greater than we are in every aspect - his power and knowledge and essential self existence are beyond our ability to know or reason. He is above and outside his creation and separate from it, but all things owe their existence to him.

CONCEPT 2 : God is IMMANENT that is to say, he is personally engaged with his creation for his own good purposes and that everything is continually sustained by Him.

NOTE : Acts 17 : 22-31 contains both concepts

REACTIONS TO JESUS (Link each reaction to either Concept 1 or 2, above.)

Just an ORDINARY man (Home town reaction - Mt13:57)

An EXTRAORDINARY man (Crowd's reaction to Jesus' teaching - Mk 1:22)

A man UNLIKE any other - (Peter's reaction to a boat full of fish! - Lk5:8)

A man, but NOT just a man - (Thomas' reaction to the resurrection - Jn20:28)

B. WHAT IS THIS TRANSCENDENT GOD LIKE?

The Creation accounts tell us about this God

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" Gen1:1

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. Jn1:1-3

1. God alone is **ETERNAL** : everything else has a beginning. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth ... from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Ps90:2)
2. God exercises exclusive and infinite **POWER** : he only has to speak and it comes in to being. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.." Gen1:3 "When I act, who can reverse it? Is43:13
3. God is **DISTINCT** from his creation. God is not to be confused with his creation - not "*God is everything and everything is God.*"
4. God is **SOVEREIGN** over all : He acts from within himself, by the exercise of his will, and not from any external pressure, purpose or obligation. (God) works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. Eph1:11
5. God **self-EXISTS** : and is in no way dependent on anything, at any time : God said to Moses, " AM WHO I AM." (Ex3:17) The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life & breath and everything else. Acts 17:24-25
6. God alone never **CHANGES** : His essential glory cannot be enriched or diminished in any way. I the LORD do not change. (Mal3:6) *But you remain the same, and your years will never end. Ps120:27*

This, in essence, is the God that we cannot know ... or rather, the God we cannot comprehend. (Remember, however, that part two of this Study is still to come; whilst this study is "truth" - it's not the whole truth.....)

C. WHERE DOES THIS LEAD US?

Firstly, to **HUMILITY**

You asked, "Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?" Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know." My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. Job 42:3-6 See also Is40:12-28

.... then, to an overwhelming sense of **AWE**

But you, O LORD, are exalted forever." (Ps92:8) Who is like you, O Lord majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? Ex15:11

.... on to **WORSHIP**

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen. 1Tim6:16

.... and finally, as our only hope, to the **MERCY** of God

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Ps51:1