



## BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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### BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH PART 2 : "Understanding God"

June 12, 2005 Study 5 : "God Made Comprehensible in Christ"

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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 second 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\_

In this pair of Studies I am proposing two contradictory positions.

The 1st, from last week's study is:

God is so REMOVED from us that he cannot be known.

That is, 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.

### A. BACK TO THE CREATION ACCOUNT .....

Last week we used the Genesis creation accounts & other "creation context" verses to demonstrate that God exists from eternity, separate from his creation, acting in sovereign power and according to his own will and purpose; a God who is so unlike us that he is beyond our comprehension.

Let's revisit Genesis :

1. Of all creation, mankind stands in unique RELATIONSHIP with God.

"And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' ... and God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him; male & female he created them.  
Gen1:26-27

2. God demonstrates a specific CONCERN for man.

And God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone;  
I will make a helper suitable to him" Gen2:18

3. God initiates a PERSONAL relationship with man.

They heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the cool of the garden and they hid from the Lord God .... but the Lord God called 'Where are you? Gen3:8-9

So then, alongside the picture of the God "so removed from us that he cannot be known" emerges a paradox; a God who creates mankind as unique - distinct from all creation, who cares for us, and who looks for fellowship with us and who personally searches us out.

**This is the 2nd "contradictory position," that:** God is so NEAR to us that he can be known.

God is IMMANENT; he is personally engaged with his creation for his own good purposes and that everything that exists is continually sustained by Him.

## B. GOD IS NEAR US : THE OLD TESTAMENT

God is not just : a vague idea or a theoretical first CAUSE

an unknowable, unapproachable ENTITY

a disengaged, uninterested POWER.

As we have already seen from the first Chapters of Genesis, the Incomprehensible God engages mankind at a personal level. And this is consistent through the Old Testament.

1. God holds us ACCOUNTABLE. Where is your brother Abel? Gen4:9
2. God is MOVED by our circumstances and ACTS within our history. I have seen the misery of my people .. I have heard them crying out ... I am concerned about their suffering ... I have come down to rescue them. Ex3:7-8
3. God is our COMPANION through life. I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Ps23:4

Consider God's constant engagement with his people in blessing or judgement, his communication through Law & the Prophets, his presence in temple worship & provision for their sin through sacrifice, his rescue of them from exile & promises to them for the future. The Old Testament only makes sense if God is connected to his creation in general & relating to his people specifically.

## C. BUT HOW DO WE KNOW THIS GOD ....

Last week we noted that the title of our Studies "Understanding God" is presumptuous :

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

But understanding God enough so that we may know him and respond in love to him is possible - not because we are able to "figure him out" by philosophical or theological speculation, but because God has taken the initiative and deliberately revealed himself through .....

1. CREATION : The heavens declare the glory of God Ps19:1 see Rom 1:18-20

*"My faith consists of a humble admiration of the spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and humble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe forms my idea of God" .... Albert Einstein.*

2. The PROPHETS : *God spoke to our forefathers through the Prophets at many times and in various ways."* Heb1:1

3. JESUS : *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...* Heb 1:2 Which leads us to ....

## D. GOD IS NEAR US : THE NEW TESTAMENT

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. .... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14a)*

Philip asked him, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after being with you for so long? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn14:8-9)

Here is the unique and central truth of the Christian Faith. The Incomprehensible God has become one of us so that we may know him. *"The Word became flesh"* is a paradox in itself and can only be understood by a series of further paradoxes; eg. the Eternal Almighty God inhabits a young girl's womb. The Self-existing Giver and Sustainer of life is dependent on his mother to feed and care for him. The Holy One who lives in unapproachable light bears our sins in shame and abandonment.

Knowing God through Jesus? Yes! .... but we still stand before mystery and wonder.

Still the Lord God Almighty ... but now also our brother and friend (Jn8:58, 15:15)

The Agnostic is wrong. God can be known ..... in Jesus.

And, because of him *"who loved us and gave himself for us,"* to our worship of an awesome and holy God Almighty is added our LOVE and GRATITUDE.