

Basic Christianity
From An Urban Perspective Unit 1
Week 4: Who Is God?

Discussion: Why is this an important question? Why does it matter if we understand who God is or not? How does our understanding of who God is affect how we relate to him?

The more we understand about a person's motivations, interests, personality, strengths—who they are—the more able we are to deepen our relationship with them. **Understanding God's nature is crucial in developing an intimate *trust* relationship with him.**

Relating to God personally involves raising certain questions:

- **Can he *meet* my needs?**
- **What is his *will* for my life?**
- **Where do I stand with God when I *fail*?**

These issues are on the back of every Christians mind. We need to have deep personal confidence about who God is if we are to move ahead spiritually.

Common misconceptions

People in our culture view God in different ways. We should be aware of these views in part because when we share our faith, others will process what we're saying in terms of their ideas about God. We personally may take these concepts of God into our own Christian faith more than we realize.

For example:

God is a cosmic *watchdog*. God sees what you do, records it, and doesn't let you get away with anything. When you're living right, things go well. When you're not, things don't. "God don't like ugly." God is more or less like a military drill sergeant or a junior high school principal – not someone you want to spend time with. That's why most people would rather "laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints." And if the sinners are more fun, that implies God must be really uptight. People who see God as the cosmic watchdog think, "I'll start coming to church when I'm ready to start living right, but for now, I really want to enjoy life." Or if they attend church, they stop coming when they really mess up or backslide.

God is a *slot machine*. Some preachers say God will make you wealthy. If we give to him, he'll give back to us. We can't out-give God. If we give generously, God will bless us. If we give really generously, God will give us a double blessing! People who have this view of God come to him for money and for what they can get.

God *feels* me. Some people think, "God understands my hard life. He will cut me some slack."

"Is it a crime, to fight, for what is mine?
Everybody's dyin tell me what's the use of tryin
I've been Trapped since birth, cautious, cause I'm cursed...
I'd rather die like a man, than live like a coward

There's a ghetto up in Heaven and it's ours" – 2Pac, *Only God Can Judge Me*

People who have the same view as Tupac assume God will welcome them into heaven no matter how they live on earth.

God is a *senile old man*. You know, loving and forgetful. God doesn't take anything too seriously—so neither should we. We should show him reverence, but we shouldn't think that he has much to do with our lives. That's why it's okay to visit him on Sunday morning and live your own life for the rest of the week. It's kind of like visiting grandpa in the old folk's home.

For people who hold this view, Christianity is more about ceremonies and rituals than the actually learning what the Bible says or knowing Christ personally. Most people brought up in the church think this way.

The Trinity

Perhaps the hardest thing to grasp about God is the biblical doctrine of the trinity. Let's start with a definition:

"God exists as three people but is one essence."

The Bible never uses the word "trinity." It's just the best term we could come up with to describe what the Bible says about God. Consider this:

1. There is only *one* God. This belief is called *monotheism*.

"...we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God." – 1 Corinthians 8:4

2. The Bible teaches that *God is three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. The most common name for God in the Old Testament is "Elohim," which is a *plural* form for God.

In Genesis 1:26, 27, God says, "let US make man in OUR image."

The *Father* is God.

**"There is... one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all."
– Ephesians 4:5a, 6**

The *Son* is God.

"In Him [Jesus] all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." – Colossians 2:9

John 10:30, 8:58(Jesus' words); Hebrews 1:1-3, 8a (testimony of the Old Testament); Colossians 1:16, 17 (teaching of the apostles).

The *Holy Spirit* is God (see Acts 5:3, 4).

This does not mean, as Moslems claim, **that Christians believe in three Gods**. Nor does it mean that we believe **in one God who changes forms from time to time**. (e.g. like Peter Parker becoming Spider- Man).

We can try to explain the trinity by using analogies (e.g. H2O is one substance that can exist in three different states: ice, water, and steam), but we can never fully explain it. Nevertheless, the trinity is a very important doctrine.

Why is the trinity important?

Without the trinity, Jesus cannot pay for all of our sins. If Jesus is just a man, his death on the cross can only cover the sin of one person. But if he is God (and he is), he can die for the sins of the whole world, all at once.

The Bible says God is loving. But it also says he doesn't depend on anyone else to exist. **He can be loving all by himself because He is three people**. He doesn't need anyone or anything outside himself to be loving.

Amazingly, even though God enjoys perfect, loving relationships within himself between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he still loved us enough to break out of that circle of comfort and enter into our messed up lives.

Application

God desires to build the church with the same kind of unity that he has always enjoyed in the trinity. His unity is the basis for ours. Only in the body of Christ, the church, is there a genuine basis of equality and unity in the context of our great diversity. That is why different races, different backgrounds, different cultures, different ages are never an excuse for Christians not to have unity.

“The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.” – 1 Corinthians 12:11, 12

“There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” – Galatians 3:28

“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.” – John 17:22

Use an illustration?

Memory Verse: Colossians 2:9