

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

10 What Can We Believe About God?

Scripture: Acts 17:22 - 31

Steve McQueen is a well known Hollywood person. He makes his living before movie cameras. Perhaps you have heard of him. The reason why he is of interest to us arises out of the unusual way he responded to a question that was put to him on one occasion. It was a question about God. He was asked what he believed about God, and this is the way he answered. "God is my kids, my old lady, green grass, machines and animals." This certainly is an interesting way to think about God and not everyone is able to answer the question quite as succinctly and colorfully as Mr. McQueen. However, religious polls tell us that nearly everyone has done some thinking about a supreme power or being. In our part of the world time was when thoughts about God ran the same course. The man I have mentioned and many others like him show that this is no longer the case. George Harrison has well said, "When you say the word "God" people are going to curl up and cringe, they all interpret the word in a different way." John Robinson writes, "The word "God" is so slippery and the reality so intangible that many today are questioning whether they have reference to anything that can usefully or meaningfully be talked about at all." This has to be one of the most tragic truths of our time. Imagine, God having no reference to anything meaningful. How can we think of God? What can we know with certainty about a supreme being that is somehow out there somewhere?

This is a very important question for any person to consider. The reason is a person's concept of God will affect the way he thinks about everything else in the world. Our idea of God will shape our view of life, what is happening in the world today, our relationship to things and people, even the way we live every day. The Bible, God's Word, has a great deal to say about what we can believe about God. Let us, to the best of our ability, supported by prayer and God's teaching Holy Spirit, try to understand what the truthful answer to this question is. Several facts can be immediately noted about God from Scripture. We can summarize the teaching in this way.

I. GOD EXISTS: *Genesis 1:1; Romans 1:18-22, 2:14-16; John 14:8-9*

The first fact which the Bible clearly states is that God exists, and this is the very

question which is asked again and again about God. How do you know that God exists? First, let me say that this particular question is a very serious one to ask. A person who asks this question ought to realize that if the answer is yes, there are going to be some serious implications. It was Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish philosopher who suggested that it was dangerous thing to speculate about God's existence in His presence. The traditional reasons for believing in God follow the logic of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). There is the ontological argument which arises from my thoughts about God as being perfect, "which nothing greater can be conceived." The idea exists, therefore the thing itself exists. Where does the idea of perfection come from in an imperfect world? The idea relates to that which is outside my mind therefore God exists.

Next, there came the cosmological reason. Every effect has a cause. There must, therefore, be a First Cause to create the universe. The third basic clue to the existence of God, stated in its simplest form, was the teleological. This understood the design and order in the universe to necessitate a Designer; hence, God exists. These reasons for God's existence from Aquinas are to this day an official part of Roman Catholic teaching. This is the way it is stated, "If anyone says that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason through these things which are made, let him be anathema." Having mentioned these traditional arguments for God let me say that many have found them not that convincing. They conclude that God's existence is too much dependant upon man's reasoning. God exists as long as He exists in accord with how we are able think about Him, however noble and good these reasons may be. Let us consider the following reasons why we know that God exists in addition to those already mentioned.

1. The Scriptures:

God tells us that He exists in His Word, the Bible. It is certainly not beyond anyone to understand what God has plainly said. In the first few words of all those Bibles in this big world are the words, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" God certainly wasted no time in laying this truth on us. Psalm 90:2 reads, "*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*" The Bible takes the existence of God for granted. Moses did not make any effort to prove the existence of God. In his day there were already gods without number, at least so called gods. Neither did Moses start with creation and go step by step toward God, as did Aquinas. Moses

boldly asserted the existence of God and then proceeded to speak of lesser things. *"In the beginning God"*...is the exclamation of the Bible. There is not the attempt to prove God by His works, rather there is an attempt to explain the works by God. Nothing else is needed. What begins theologically will follow logically. If Moses had begun with tidy little arguments for God's existence He would have met his match in the rebellious mind of man which will not admit to the existence of this almighty God in the face of any evidence. I would say to you do not go to God by the way of nature, there are too many pitfalls. One reason we can believe that God exists is because He tells us so in His Word. Let not anyone say to God, "You never told me clearly that your were there."

2. **What Exists:**

At the expense of contradicting myself, we can know that God exists because nothing in the world is able to explain its existence in terms of itself. Everything must go outside of itself to find a reason for its presence in the world. I suppose the classic verse for this might be Romans 1:20, *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."* There is a very real way in which nature points to God. The way it points to God is by destroying the excuses man has for not glorifying God. Verse 19 reads, *"That which may be known of God..."* There is something that we can know about God from nature, not much, but something. It is not only that He is a great designer, but that He is very, very powerful. The fact that He upholds all things is a rebuke to every man's disrespect, ungratefulness, silly speculations, and groping heart. (Romans 1:21) What exists all around us, the created universe and everything in it, confirms what our inner moral sense has already told us. God exists. This leads me to our third consideration. The First Cause of Aquinas gets a boost from our modern thermodynamics. The Law of Increasing Disorder indicates that the universe is running down. All processes move toward a state of decay. Eventually, the universe will wear out. Since that has not happened, the universe is not infinitely old. It had therefore, a beginning, it had a First Cause,

3. **Conscience:**

This is the inbred sense of obligation that all people possess. It is seated in the

soul and is the ability to judge oneself as to moral fitness, that is, the quality of actions. Duty is more than a dream. This is true when it comes to duty toward God. Across the world, man's conscience assents to the law of God. This work of God, His law, was written on the very constitution of man and into his very personality. Granted, this sensitivity has been dimmed, but the standard by which all will be judged will be according to the highest and the best he knows. Now Paul, in Romans 2, makes the sweeping indictment that all Gentiles have a kind of law unto themselves. In verse 15 we read, *"Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing them witness..."* You and I have not always lived up to what we knew was right. We stand condemned by our own conscience. People are therefore without excuse knowing that we have not lived up to this sense of ought. It was the rationalist Kant who maneuvered God out of his thinking until he came to this innate sensitivity to right and wrong. He concluded there must be a lawgiver in which it is grounded and that lawgiver must be God. It is a certainty that obedience to conscience or to the best one knows is the best way to receiving greater understanding to what is right or wrong. There is something that is known about God by every person intuitively, it abides in the awareness of right and wrong. This is the answer to those who are forever asking about the people who have never heard about God as we have heard about Him. Paul speak about them when he says in Romans 2:15, *"Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing them witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another."* You needn't speak of the things people don't know or understand. We always swing right into that. That is not the main issue in chapters 1-5 of Romans. Whether Gentile who did not live up to what his conscience told him, or Jew who did not live up to the laws God had given him, the issue is what men know. They do not live up to what they know already. We can know there is a God because His law is written in bur hearts. Its the reason why we are concerned enough even to ask the question whether or not God exists. Only a fool will decry what he knows to be true in his heart. That is what the Bible says about such a person. *"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."* (Psalm 53:1)

We must understand in talking about the existence of God that there are different kinds of evidences for different kinds of realities. It is folly to attempt a proof of God's existence scientifically. God will not be capable of verification by experimental science. I hesitate to say it; but there is entirely too much atheism

because the Supreme Being does not submit to methods which are suitable to the laboratory. Science, the authority millions have chosen to live under, has neither proven nor disproven the existence of God. Conscience cannot be weighed upon a scale, yet its effects upon the moral and religious history of the human race can hardly be told. It is just incredible that universally, to the most remote and primitive peoples, belief in God or a supreme being characterizes human life. The more recent study of primitive records has revealed that an individual deity was the original conviction in societies which became polytheistic. Their plurality of gods was misunderstood, and was actually a series of manifestations of one god. Conscience is the moral intuition God has given to the human race. It is not a product of one's environment, although environment can shape one's conscience. The conscience thus, is not infallible. According to Paul in writing to Timothy, the conscience can be rendered insensitive (I Tim.4:2). Functioning as God intended it should awaken us to His existence and bring satisfaction to our lives. (II Corinthians 1:12-14).

4. Jesus Christ

The fourth reason why we can believe that God exists is Jesus Christ. We have an interesting incident recorded in John 14:8 - 9. *"Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it will satisfy us."* Jesus saith unto him, *"Have I been so long with you and yet you didn't know me?"* The answer Jesus gave to Philip had to do with the divine nature He shared with God the Father. It was the kind of nature that each of the three personalities of the Godhead had in common. In a Word, you can't explain the uniqueness of Jesus Christ unless God exists. Of all sources, Napoleon comes with a real good word here, "I know men and I tell you Jesus Christ was not a man, He was a being by himself." That is why twenty centuries after Jesus walked on this earth we have the amazing phenomenon of millions of people worshiping Him. The fact of the matter is that He compels worship once He has been viewed according to truth. His life can be compared to a gem with many shining surfaces. Each surface which is examined will seem predominant as the light strikes upon it. The preeminence of Jesus can be seen in His miraculous birth, he was born as no person has ever been born. His life He declared to be an open book to be read from any page without the disclosure of a single default in thought, word, or deed. The New Testament gives a picture of Jesus teaching and expounding truth which astonished listeners on the mountain, in the desert, in the synagogue and home, along the shore and in

the temple. He was full of a message. He taught as one having authority and not as the skilled but authoritative scholars of His time. As teacher He has no peer throughout recorded history. His death was the end of an earthly life of healing, prayer, and love for people. Jesus accomplished something by the very act of dying. He gave substance to God's plan to punish sin without punishing the individual sinner. Christ's death reconciled the world to God (II Corinthians 5:19; Romans 11:32; I Timothy 4:10). The resurrection of Christ from the dead demands the existence of God and upon this event we can take our stand. By this means Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4; Acts 17:31). Look closely at Jesus Christ, look very closely at Him. He will lead you to believe in a living and personal God.

5. **Ourselves:**

I am reminded of the college professor who was asked by a group of his students for an appointment. What he didn't know was they were coming to put him down because of his belief in God. They were armed to the teeth with answers to any possible reasons he would be able to muster for his defense. They had expected him to go the traditional route, the argument from order, design, and providence. Instead he shocked them. When they asked why he believed in God he simply and calmly replied, "Because I have a need and God has met that need." Let me say that this business of putting forth reasons for believing in the existence of God can be a very cold intellectual road. It can be a matter of the head and of words all the way. But this is not where the trouble lies with most people. People know enough about God to believe in Him a thousand times over. The great thing is that a person can come to a confidence about God through what He does in the life. You remember the blind man who Jesus healed. He had the best word of all about believing in God. He said, "*Whereas I was blind, now I see!*" (John 9:25). The greatest wonder in the world today is not the wonder of creation with all of its beauty. It is the wonder of a transformed life. I like what the professor said to those boys, "I have a need, and God has met that need."

This matter of God's existence is of great importance to everyone. For one thing, the matter of God's existence alters our interpretation of all things. Granted that He is the creator keeper God the Bible says He is, it is impossible to know all there is to know about something or someone without including God. The whole truth cannot be known about anything when God is excluded. In his book, **Death In The City**, Francis Schaeffer illustrates this in the story of the materialist, the

Christian, the chair and the clock. The two sit facing each other in a room, which is to them the universe. The materialist proceeds to explore and analyze the universe. It takes him a long time. As an old man, having employed all the scientific processes, he emerges with a big set of books which are said to give a detailed description of the universe. The Christian takes several months to examine the work and finally says, "Well, this is a tremendous work, but it is drastically incomplete." He proceeds to explain, to the shock of the materialist, there is no account of the origin of things, nothing of the unseen portion of the universe, nor is there a satisfactory understanding of history. The Christian exclaims, "You only know half of your universe!" So, there are totally different, mutually exclusive, views of everything. They will never come together. One is right and one is wrong. The choice a person makes depends upon the way one thinks of God, whether He is there or not. The reasons I have mentioned are sufficient evidence to believe in the existence of God. Some people think that evidence must be seen and touched, as an animal is able to see a bowl of Alpo and eat it. We are not mere animals. There is more to us. We have reason and can appreciate intellectual signs. The evidence of beauty in art and music is apprehended by man's mind, not by his senses. My dog, Max, can hear the sounds and see the object, but go away without being much impressed. Therefore, the evidence for God's existence has to do with an evaluation of certain clues which God has given to us. It is in this light that we speak of the Scripture, causality, moral obligation, Jesus Christ, and the effect of spiritual regeneration. Now let us move on to consider other ways we can think about God.

II. GOD IS ALONE: *Isaiah 44:6*

Not only can we believe that God is, but that God is alone. By that we mean that there is only one true and living God. The so called Gods of the World are only products of men's imagination and speculation. People are actually very good at making Gods. When they do not fancy any of the popular religions, cults or churches, what they do is to design a god of their own. The trouble is man will always make a God in his own image. He will make a god that suits him, and is precisely the way he thinks god should be. This is a dead end street. It leads nowhere. God's of little minds don't do a thing for you. The God of the Bible is a big God. He is so big that there is nothing else that merits His name. There are other supernatural beings and powers which do exist, but they subordinate to the one living God. The following verses are helpful in understanding that only

one God exists: Deuteronomy 4:35, 6:4, 32:39; Psalm 83:18, 86:10; Isaiah 43:10, 44:6, 45:18; Mark 12:29 - 30. We ought not to be influenced by all the loose talk that is everywhere circulating about this god or that. This business of making gods has wrought much grief inasmuch as when God is humanized He is reduced in size and no longer worthy of awe and wonder. Perhaps this would not be true if the Christian faith was proclaimed more understandably and aggressively and people were confronted with God's greatness.

III. GOD IS PURE SPIRIT: John 4:24

Words are able to convey accurately, but not adequately, our understanding of God. When we use the word "*Spirit*" to describe God we mean the class or genus to which He belongs. In this way we are able to understand the specific difference which distinguishes God from other persons or things. A spirit is an invisible and incorporeal being although it may manifest itself in invisible form. The essence and manifestation of the essence may be entirely different. (Luke 24:39; Deuteronomy 4:15-18; John 1:18; Exodus 24:10) The Scripture does not contradict itself when we realize essence and manifestation are compatible. Dr. A. Strong in his Systematic Theology writes, "God is the infinite arid perfect Spirit in which all things have their source, support and end." (p.52) We certainly must put away thoughts of God as being human. God is pure spirit who knows no such limitations, physical or otherwise. Admittedly, this kind of God is incomprehensible by lesser intelligences, although knowable as to the fact of His being.

IV. GOD IS TRIUNE: *Matthew 28:19*

The indications in Scripture of this truth are Genesis 1:26, 11:7, 16:7-13, 18:1-21, 19:1-28; Malachi 3:1; Psalm 33:4-6; Proverbs 8:12-31; Matthew 28:19; I Corinthians 12:4-6; II Corinthians 13:14; I Peter 1:2; John 14:10, 13, 16, 17. The early Christians were Jews who had been instructed from childhood that God is one. Evidently, God did not intend to reveal the doctrine of the Trinity in its fullness prior to the coming of Christ. In the Old Testament there are veiled references to this truth. Gradually the Jews came to understand the oneness of God in a new way. This was a radical reinterpretation of an old truth. The doctrine of the Trinity is the authentic teaching of Christ and does not violate rational principle while remaining a mystery to us. The idea is not-unintelligible. It has certain meaning to Christians. God's life within the Divine Nature exists in three distinct aspects which are personal and known to us as Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. The three leaf clover has often been used as a feeble illustration of the tri-unity of the Godhead. Each of the leaves is equal, and the same. Yet, each leaf is separate and distinct. The three persons of the Godhead are equal in power and Holiness, yet distinct from the other. The flow of time which we understand as past, present and future which include all time is another way to illustrate the trinity. The importance of the doctrine lies in our worship of God as He is and not as we may choose to think of Him. Also, we have a high view of Scripture when we are willing to take God at His Word. Most important, this unity within a multiplicity means that the Bible story about Jesus Christ is very plausible. The reason why we can believe that Christ was God is grounded in the truth of the trinity.

V. GOD IS INFINITE: *Psalms 145:3*

The infinitude of God is difficult for us to grasp, it is impossible for a limited mind to apprehend the unlimited. That is what the infinitude of God means. He is without any limit at all. This is saying a great deal about God. It means He is perfect in all of his attributes, both moral and natural. In time, He is eternal. In knowledge, He is all-knowing, In Space, He is unlimited or omnipresent. He is everywhere at the same time. We may use the word carelessly. We say a person took infinite pains to do this or that. Not so. Such a word belongs to God and God alone.

In power, God is unlimited. He is omnipotent. He is able to do what He wants to do, what He wills to do. His power is without limitation, but will always act in character. He wills to do only that which is righteous. God's power brings nature (Psalm 107:25,29; 33:6-9; Nahum 1:3-6) into subjection. All men live out their lives under God's power (James 4:12-15). Angels bow to God's power and might (Psalm 103:20; Hebrews 1:14). Satan is also under God (Revelation 20:10; I John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14). It is not easy for us who are sons of the machine age, who have witnessed the energy of the atom to respect the fact that ultimate power is vested in God.

By way of review, God is infinite in knowledge (Proverbs 15:3; Psalm 147:4; Proverbs 5:21; Psalm 139:2-3; Psalm 139:4; I Chronicles 28:9; Matthew 10:29-30; Acts 15:18). God is infinite in terms of time. He is timeless. He transcends time and is not subject to its limitations (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). God is infinite spatially. He is everywhere present. His essence fills the universe in all of its parts (Psalm 139:1,10; Matthew 28:20, 18:20; Hebrews 4:13; Jeremiah 2:23-24).

Thus, we may speak of God as being sovereign. He has absolute power over all created things at all times. (I Timothy 6:15-16; Revelation 4:11; Daniel 4:25, 35; Romans 11:36)

Several years ago a group of Christian leaders were bogged down with the problem of defining God. Several suggestions had been made which were never approved for adoption. It was finally decided that they would spend some time in prayer in order to seek the mind of the Holy Spirit in the matter. One of the men inadvertently prefaced his prayerful petition with these words. "Oh God, thou art a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." This ejaculatory poem of praise caught the attention of the group and was in time adopted as a part of the Westminster Confession of Faith. This definition is an adequate one. It first defines God according to His class or genus, and then distinguishes Him as to the qualities which are inherent in His essence. God's infinity extends to all of His qualities. Only His holy nature and things self contradictory (God cannot lie, die or be deceived. God cannot make a square circle.) are a limitation to Him. We can believe that God is infinite, and that He is sovereign. Because He is sovereign He will not share His glory with another. In Isaiah 42:8 we read, *"I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images."* We read in Exodus 20:5 that God possesses the attitude of jealousy. *"...for I the Lord God am a jealous God,"* is the way the Bible reads. We think of jealousy as a feeling of resentment or envy toward a more successful person. It is different with God. The Greek word means to be filled with a burning desire. God is filled with a burning desire for His people to recognize that He is sovereign and that all glory belongs to Him alone. This is Christian Theism and it holds that a mighty God has created all things and providentially maintains what He has created. Its counterpart is to endow nature or some other such thing with the capacity to produce and maintain the world.

VI. GOD IS HOLY: *Isaiah 6:1-9, 57:15; Exodus 15:11; Revelation 4:1-8*

God is utterly, completely, totally good. The Old Testament word used to say that God is holy is "qudash". It comes from a root, "qad" which means to "cut" or to "separate." The basic meaning is to be apart. In the New Testament we have the word "hagios" which means to "separate" or to "set apart." Applied to God, it means He is free of all defilement and imperfection. He is not simply beyond evil, but His essence is free from impurity. This attribute of God is important because of the effect it has on what else God is. This quality profoundly affects

the whole. If you modify here then you topple the concept of God which is thoroughly Christian. The way this attribute of God interacts with all others is immediately seen. Everything God does, thinks, or feels, will be qualified by His holiness. His judgment and wisdom will be according to holiness. He will act upon all things and persons in holiness. His love will be holy. His justice will be right and just. The laws He sets upon men will be an expression of His character. Man's sin will be an affront to God because of this quality of God. God is not able to say that man's disobedience does not exist or does not matter. God is so holy, God is so pure, He cannot have a relationship with iniquity.

VII. GOD IS PERSONAL: *Hebrews 1:1-3; Matthew 6:1-13; Genesis 3:13-15*

Having moved thus far in our study of what we can believe about God, I am quick to say it is not yet enough. The reason that this is true is one of relationship. God being Spirit, Triune, Infinite, and Holy may only serve to remove Him even further from us. In the Bible we come to understand God not as some force of energy or some abstract philosophical principle, or good influence. God is revealed to us as a person. He has intelligence, reason, feeling, concern, love, and will. One of the ways God has chosen to reveal this truth to us is by the names He has chosen for Himself. When God spoke to Moses He said, ***"I Am That I Am."*** This is the Hebrew *"Yahweh."* It means the one who is there. Another name used is the name *"Father."* This is not a word that denotes gender, a quality which befits material bodies and human beings. The word "Father" is the nearest human expression suitable for the truth it is meant to declare. It has to do with God's parental dispositions toward His children. We are not speaking here of the Fatherhood of God as if all people are the sons of God. There is only one way to enter God's family so that you are able to call God your Father. That way is best described in Acts 20:21, *"...repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."* Otherwise, there is another family to which all belong as described by the Lord Himself in John 8:44, *"You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do."* God wants us to know that we can interact with Him in a kind of Father-child relationship. This is the way we can think of Him once we have received adoption into His family. (Romans 8:15-16)

"God is truly personal although our point of view about God usually falls short here. Let me illustrate this way. A stone is a being and a man is a being. Both are beings by virtue of existence. The description of "being" is equally true of both; yet, one who knew only stones would not know the full implication of the word. So, also, man is personal and God is personal. Personhood is true of both. We

who have only an experience of human persons, fail to apprehend the full implications when applied to God. While there is not parallel identity fully, there is true analogy of concept. As you think today of yourself in terms of a being who thinks, feels and wills, so you are able to think of God in that way. In revealing Himself to us in this way, God has conveyed the real truth about Himself to our lesser capacity. We can express in a human way a characteristic which is really in God, we can know Him as Father.

Briefly, this has been a superficial summation of what we can believe about God according to the Bible. These propositions which I have chosen to describe God fall short of what God can mean to a human being. They do provide some helpful guidelines. The important question is, "Do you know this God? Have you found rest for your soul in Him?" This truth must not remain theory; it will do little for you that way. Look to this living God today. Take Him at His Word. Take His Son into your heart as your personal Savior. Confess your sin and turn your life over to Christ. You will know for sure that these things are so when you do that. (John 7:17)

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