

Unwrapping The Bible

Understanding God's Essential Truths

DAVID R. VEERMAN

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Unwrapping the Bible: Understanding God's Essential Truths

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INTRODUCTION

THE WORDS *THEOLOGY* AND *DOCTRINE* sound academic and dry, indicating topics that appeal only to academics, scholars. Yet they are vital for anyone who wants to know the truth about God, his nature, works, and will. God has given us the Bible, his Word, and we affirm that it is divinely inspired, inerrant, and infallible. So certainly we should want to know what it teaches. To do this, theologians (biblical scholars) search the Scriptures and organize their findings into subject categories called “doctrines.” Their task is to discover what *all* of God’s Word says on a specific topic, not just one verse, a collection of verses, or a Scripture portion.

To use a simple example, consider the construction of a house. Carpenters and other tradespeople don’t start by assembling the roof or framing the walls; rather, construction begins by preparing the site and laying the foundation. Everything else goes up from there, built upon the solid foundation.

Theology is the foundation for the Christian faith. A “house of faith” built on anything else (e.g., feelings, future, fears, friendships) will ultimately crash, especially during the storms and earthquakes of life.

But the foundation (theology), while vital, is just the beginning. The rest of the structure needs to be built. James had some strong words to say about those who think that knowing and believing are enough: “You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one

God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror” (James 2:19). His point is that we can’t stop with Christian doctrines and having all the answers; we must build on that foundation. And that means allowing the Holy Spirit to use the truths of Scripture to change our lives. We need to act on what we believe.

This passage summarizes it perfectly: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to teach you the basics of the Christian faith and how those basics should change your life. In short, as a result of working your way through this book, you will know what the whole Bible teaches about seven foundational doctrines and put them into practice in daily living.

So read all the Scripture passages and the written explanations and prayerfully and carefully answer all the study questions. Build your faith-house!

Dave Veerman

DOCTRINE OF GOD



SESSION 1

Introduction

OBJECTIVE:

As a result of this lesson, you will know why having a true understanding of God is foundational for theology and life.

LOOK

“God Is . . .”

1. When you were a child of five or six years of age, how did you picture God? Write a description or draw a picture or symbol of that idea of God.
2. Where or from whom did you get your early ideas about God?
3. In what ways has your understanding of God changed through the years? Why?

People have many misconceptions about God. Here are a few. God is . . .

- a strict disciplinarian, looking for rule-breakers, ready to punish.
- a kind old man, somewhat forgetful and permissive.
- a watchmaker who has designed the universe and set everything in motion but is no longer involved in it.
- an impersonal force or spirit.
- someone who rewards good people and gives gifts to those who ask.
- a powerful tyrant who is always looking for revenge.
- everywhere and in everything, so that every living animal and plant is in some way divine.
- the all-powerful judge, deciding who goes to heaven and who goes to hell based on their deeds.

What Difference Does It Make?

4. What difference might a person's concept of God make on how he or she lives?

What someone thinks a person is like affects how he or she acts and reacts to that person. For example, return in your imagination to those childhood years. Suppose you heard that a man living in a certain house nearby is mean and hates children—and he could even hurt them. You probably would avoid that house if possible. And if you had to go near it, you would be anxious and nervous, fearing that he might come out and confront you.

Having ideas about someone you don't know isn't limited to childhood. It is a common practice in just about every sphere of life. We can think a person is a certain way because of how he or she looks or talks or because of what we have heard about him or her. We form

opinions and act accordingly, even if those opinions are based on very little evidence. And often those ideas can harm us.

- We may avoid someone who wants to give help.
- We may think someone is lying when he or she is trying to warn us about a danger.
- We may miss out on a good gift because we mistrust the package.
- We may assume that someone is kind and good who may, in reality, *not* have our best interests at heart.

Clearly knowing the truth about someone will help us know how to relate to that person.

If this is important in human relationships, consider how vital it is in a relationship with God. Some people have formed their ideas about God because of rumors and false opinions. Others have a very negative view of God *the Father* because the word *Father* brings up painful memories of their earthly father. Some don't think much of God because of the actions of people who claim to be his followers. Whatever the reasons or sources of misinformation, they lead to the misconceptions listed earlier (and others).

5. Let's revisit those false ideas about God. Think about your own picture of God and what others might be thinking. How might we respond to God if we picture him as . . .

- a strict man, looking for rule-breakers, always ready to punish?
- a kindly old man, somewhat forgetful and permissive?
- a wise watchmaker who has designed the universe and set everything in motion but is not involved in it?

- an impersonal force or spirit?
- someone who rewards good people and gives gifts to those who ask?
- a powerful, vengeful tyrant who is looking for revenge?
- everywhere and in everything, so that every living animal and plant is in some way divine?
- the divine judge, deciding who goes to heaven and who goes to hell based on their works?

A pastor had a conversation with a young man who declared that he was an atheist. When the pastor asked what that meant, the young man said he didn't believe in God. So the pastor asked, "What kind of god don't you believe in?" After the young man gave his answer, the pastor responded, "I don't believe in that god either." The young man had been rejecting a false idea about God, not the true God. All of us need to see our misconceptions of God for what they are and turn to God as he has revealed himself.

LISTEN

The Source

The place to find the truth about God is the Bible, his revealed Word. Listen to this powerful statement about God: "Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength"

(Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Not many gods, but one—and this God demands total allegiance.

During the next few sessions, we'll be looking into the Bible (also called "Scripture") to learn about God, but here's just a taste, a few descriptions of God.

6. For each passage, write one truth that the passage reveals about God.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

GENESIS 1:1

But the LORD is in his holy Temple; the LORD still rules from heaven. He watches everyone closely, examining every person on earth. The LORD examines both the righteous and the wicked. He hates those who love violence.

PSALM 11:4-5

And they said, "We give thanks to you, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who always was, for now you have assumed your great power and have begun to reign."

REVELATION 11:17

I will proclaim the name of the LORD; how glorious is our God! He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is!

DEUTERONOMY 32:3-4

The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

PSALM 19:7

But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

MATTHEW 5:48

The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

2 CHRONICLES 16:9

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.

PSALM 139:7-8

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:20

Praise the LORD, all you nations. Praise him, all you people of the earth. For his unfailing love for us is powerful; the LORD's faithfulness endures forever. Praise the LORD!

PSALM 117:1-2

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

1 PETER 5:7

But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

1 JOHN 4:8-10

LIVE

Profound Truths

The previous set of Bible passages is comprised of four sets of three, each set highlighting a profound truth about God. These verses have been chosen as *examples*, representing the clear teaching of all of Scripture.

The first three (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 11:4-5; Revelation 11:17) speak to God's *power*. He is the Creator, the Ruler, the Almighty.

The second three (Deuteronomy 32:3-4; Psalm 19:7; Matthew 5:48) highlight God's *perfection*. All of who he is and everything he does is perfect.

The next three (2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 139:7-8; Matthew 28:20) explain that God is everywhere *present*. Throughout the earth and above and below, he is always with us. Nothing is outside his presence.

The last three (Psalm 117:1-2; 1 Peter 5:7; 1 John 4:8-10) show that God is intensely *personal*. He loves us and cares for us.

Yes, God is *powerful, perfect, present, and personal*. The next four lessons will focus on these broad characteristics in depth.

Preparation

To prepare for the next lesson, find other Bible passages that describe God's greatness—his power, knowledge, and authority. List them here.

Prayer

Talk with God, highlighting his attributes of *power* (God can do what he promises), *perfection* (what God plans for you is what is best for you), *presence* (God—the source of love, grace, beauty, forgiveness, and kindness—delivers these in your life), and *personality/love* (God wants to have a relationship with you, now and forever).

You may want to sing the hymn "How Great Thou Art."