

## LESSON II

# God: His Being and Attributes

## CHAPTER I

### THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Does God exist? This is a question of foremost interest in the religious, philosophical and theological world of today. The question itself is valid from the standpoint of a person seeking to know Truth. But if it is only from an intellectual viewpoint that we debate the question, then we can come up against many barriers that stand in the way of true belief in the existence of God. More than intellect is needed to create in man a saving faith. But rational arguments for God's existence can show that a belief in God is reasonable. And it could help to strengthen belief.

Traditionally there are five 'proofs' for the existence of God. Some of these were developed by Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, while others were developed by more modern students of philosophy. The five arguments given here are amongst the most common used, to show that God can and does exist.

**The Ethnological Argument:** This is sometimes called the historical argument. People all over the world, in every type of culture and degree of civilization, have tended to believe in God. There is a universal sense of the divine. As a result there has developed various external expressions of worship towards God. Within man, then, there seems to be an inherent conviction that a Higher Power exists. The awareness of God appears to be part of human nature itself.

**The Cosmological Argument:** Basically this is an argument of cause and effect. The entire Universe, with all its complexities and wonders, needed a sufficiently Great Cause to bring it into being. Chance as a cause is really repugnant to common sense. God is shown as the Ultimate Cause of the Universe. And of necessity this Ultimate Cause must be indefinitely great, and definitely greater than the result or creation of that Cause. Simply we could say, that this world of ours needed a World Maker. And that World Maker is God.

**The Teleological Argument:** This is also a causal argument. It continues the former argument. An investigation of the Universe reveals intelligence, order, harmony and purpose. Such a Universe demands a very Intelligent Being to bring it into creation. That Intelligence of Purposeful Being is seen as a Great Mind that is responsible for the order and design in nature. Commonly, this argument is used in terms of the World as design and God as designer.

**The Ontological Argument:** A somewhat more difficult argument and the most opposed. Logically, it is an argument based on an idea, and hence on an abstract. This of course leads to the fallacy of arguing from abstract to reality. But it has been used as a common

argument. Man thinks of God as perfect. For something to be perfect it must exist. Therefore God exists. Along the same line it is argued that the thought of the created implies a Creator, and so on. For such thinking to be valid God must exist as Infinite, Creator, etc. Such an argument, however, already presupposes the existence of God.

**The Moral Argument:** Man is both an intellectual as well as a moral being. Despite various definitions of morality, it is evident that man is in a moral arena. Moral law is seen in the world. Mere matter cannot account for the existence of this moral law, or the moral nature of man. Hence there has to be a Moral Being higher and greater than man himself. The reign of moral law necessitates a Moral Lawgiver. The need for a moral ideal, for a 'good' necessitates the existence of a Highest Good.

All the above arguments do not really 'prove' God's existence. They can show, however, that faith in God is reasonable. But they are definitely insufficient to convince man that a personal, loving, infinite God exists. Some of the arguments show the existence of a Creator. Others show the reasonableness of believing in a Moral Lawgiver. But we need more than rational arguments, more than 'nature theology' to know God in a personal way. Man does not become a Christian, a believer in a God who saves from sin, by simply changing his intellectual beliefs. Only when man is made aware of his sin, and his need for a Saviour, can he have a changed faith, and be led to become a Christian.

To develop such a faith and to really know and believe the existence of God, man needs revealed truth. That is, he needs something beyond his own rationality to know of the greatness, goodness and the very being of God. And such a faith is possible based upon revelation.

**The Scriptures:** The Scriptures, the Bible, is God's inspired and revealed Word to man. Within the Bible there is ample assertion that a personal, infinite God exists. And that He is Creator and Sustainer of this Universe; that He is the author of true morality; and above all that He has given man salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

**Jesus Christ:** Again, within the Bible, Christ has stated that He knew of the existence of God through experience and fellowship. In one passage of Scripture, He stated, that He who hath seen Him (Jesus Christ) hath seen the Father. (John 14:9). We can know of God through the Son.

**Christian Experience:** Men through the ages have testified, through experience, that they have had personal fellowship with God. That is through the saving blood of Christ they know that a personal, loving God exists. Such testimony of others can become a reality in our own lives, if we are willing to let God have a chance in our life. We can know His fellowship and power if we submit to the Bible and what it says about the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

One cannot conclude that God does not exist because some have chosen to deny that existence. We also cannot relegate God's existence to mere illusion when testimonies of millions, authentic Word, and natural theology as well, point to the reality of His being. Nor can we turn to the present trend of irrationalism to deny His being. To do so would be to deny man's rationality.

But let us not be content to just rationalize His existence and intellectually prove the reasonableness of having a belief in a Creator God. Let us know Him through His Word and through His Son, Jesus Christ, that we can be led to Him through the path of Salvation. Only then can we truly say, ‘I know that there is a God for He has saved me and now orders my own life.’

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## CHAPTER II

### THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Together with questions regarding the existence of God, come questions about His Being. Questions like, ‘What is God? What is His nature? What makes Him to be what He is?’

Such questions can only be answered as much as has been revealed to us. That is, we cannot give complete, adequate answers as to the nature and essence of God, beyond what He has revealed to us. To attempt to so answer them would be utterly impossible. The Finite (man) cannot comprehend the Infinite (God). Our knowledge of the Being of God is limited to what we know of His attributes.

We could simply say that God and His attributes are one. We cannot say that God’s attributes are parts of God, for God is not, like men, made up of various parts. Rather, they are qualities that are inherent in the being of God. And these are essential qualities. Each one of them reveals to us some real aspect of the Being of God.

Let us re-affirm that we know of God and His attributes only through revelation. Herein does Christianity differ from other religions. We can know of some of God’s greatness and power through nature. But the greater revelation of the attributes of God comes through a study of the Word of God, the Bible. And again, we know of God’s attributes when we see the fuller revelation, of Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ showed man what was needed to be known about God.

The attributes of God could be divided into various ways. We will divide them here into the Absolute attributes and the Transitive attributes. The former are also called the intransitive attributes. They are such as reside in the divine nature alone, without any relation to God’s creation. The latter attributes are also called the relative attributes. These are those that are related to His creation, particularly man. But let us remember, however, that the attributes of God concern God’s Being itself. They are ways of man viewing or knowing more of the Being of God.

#### A. THE ABSOLUTE ATTRIBUTES

1. **Spirituality:** The Bible declares that God is a spirit. We read this in the Gospel of John, chapter 4, verse 24. As spirit then, He is neither earthly nor visible. Nor is He

corruptible, meaning that which dies or decays. Thus we differ from pantheism. God is not matter, nor dependent on matter. As Creator of the material world, He is independent of matter, which He created.

Again, He is living. The Bible says this often. In the New Testament, in I Thessalonians we can read it in chapter 1, verse 9. But not only is He living, He is also the author of life. We read various accounts of this in the Bible. He gave life to the dead son of a widow at Nain, (Luke 7:14-16). He raised to life the daughter of Jairus, (Mark 5:38-43). To a person dead four days, Jesus could order that he come forth alive, (John 11:23-44). But not only was He the author of physical life, but the giver of spiritual life as well. The New Testament gives numerous accounts of how lives were transformed by Him. An example is the life of Paul, and how through the power of Christ he was changed from persecutor to preacher and apostle. Paul himself stated this in I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 9 & 10. God indeed is the author of all of life.

Also, the Bible describes God as a personal presence. And the revelation of God through Jesus Christ was a personal revelation. The personality of God refers to God being both self-conscious and self-determining. He has plans and He works out His plans. Because of God's personality we can go to Him in prayer, knowing that He knows, and cares, and feels and understands. Here again, Christianity differs with those religions that make of God an impersonal deity. Because of God's personality that human personality is respected by Him. Thus we have the moral nature of man as well as the religious. Because we have a personal God we find such commandments as in Proverbs, chapter 10, verse 27, 'The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.'

Thus in the attributes of Spirituality we see God as being Living; having power to author Life; and possessing Personality. We could say that the attributes of God's spirituality are: Life; Energy; and Personality.

2. **Infinity:** The Infinity of God can be divided into the attributes of self-existence, immutability and unity.

The self-existence of God is His independence in every realm. He exists, or has the basis of existence in Himself. Man has the cause of his existence outside himself, but not God. One evidence of this was stated by Jesus Himself when He said, 'For as the Father hath life in Himself even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself' (John 5:26). God is independent in His thought, His power, His will, etc.

God is also immutable, that is unchanging. In His character and in His counsel, He is unchanging. He neither improves or decays as a Being. There should be no misunderstanding between God's unchanging nature and his ability to act at any time. If God's attitude towards man changes, it is really not God who has changed but man has been led to change, making the relationship with God take on a new aspect. In the Old Testament the Word of God clearly states that God is unchanging, 'For I am the Lord, I change not... (Malachi 3:6).

Also in God's infinity is His unity. The Bible has declared many times that God is one; He is the only God; He is the true God, etc. We read this in I Kings 8:60... 'Jehovah. He is God; there is none else. Also, Paul wrote, 'But to us there is but one God, the Father...' I Cor. 8:6. There are numerous statements such as these in the Bible. This contradicts the doctrine of polytheism found in many religions. Polytheism would destroy the unity of the universe. There is but one God and none else.

3. **Perfection.** God's perfection deals with 'moral' attributes. They are His truth, His love and His holiness.

By God's truth we do not mean the truthfulness of God. Rather, we mean that God in His nature is true. He is the perfect realization of the Godhead. In other words, He is all that God should be. Hence other gods and concepts of gods are called vanity and lies. In Psalm 115:4-8 we read of how other gods compare to the true God, John's Gospel chapter 17, verse 3 says that God is the only true God.

God's love, as part of His perfection, is not His love to mankind. It is His limitless perfection within Himself. It is the infinite attitude that exists in the Godhead. Jesus prayed for His disciples in John's Gospel chapter 17, verse 24, that they may see His glory which was given by God to Him in His love for Christ before the foundation of the world. (Read John 1 & 24).

Similarly, is God's holiness. Not the moral excellence alone, but God's separation from what is finite. Here again the nearness of God should not be misunderstood. But God is beyond the mortal and finite in His glory and being. Thus He can author that which is holy and right as moral law. But He is also transcendent and He alone exists in an absolute sense.

Thus God in His perfection is absent of all limitations or defects and is boundless in His wisdom and power. And all the absolute attributes of God have not any reference or relationship with anything or anyone else.

## **B. THE TRANSITIVE ATTRIBUTES**

The transitive attributes of God are those which are related to the material universe, to all living creatures, and to men in particular.

In the first group we have three attributes.

1. **Eternity.** Eternity relates to time. God is timeless. He has existed forever and will exist forever. Thus the Old Testament says that God is the first and the last, Isaiah 41:4, and the New Testament declares that He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. Revelation 1:8.

2. **Immensity.** Immensity refers to space. It is that attribute of God by which He is spatially unlimited. His entire Being is present in every space. These are infinite qualities. God is transcendentally immense. This is not in agreement with pantheism. Pantheism makes of God present in every point of space because, He is said to be part of the material Universe. But Christianity declares what the Bible says that God is beyond this material substance and is spatially immense only because of His infinite qualities. In the Bible, in I Kings, chapter 8 and verse 27, we read of how the heaven of heavens cannot contain God.
3. **In-corporeality.** God is not limited to a body. As was said earlier, He is spirit. He is not bound to any body of any form. The Bible says in Colossians 1:15, that God is invisible.

The second group, related to all living creatures, also has three attributes.

4. **Omnipotence.** Omnipotence means all-powerful. God is all powerful. He can do anything. He is not bound by anything. He can act without limitation. But He cannot sin; nor be untrue to His nature; or break His promises. These are contrary to His very Being and are not limitations. Jesus Himself said that with God all things are possible. Matthew 19:26.
5. **Omniscience.** This means all-knowing. God is all knowing. The Bible says in Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 13, that all things are open to His eyes. Various passages could be cited from the Bible to show God's omniscience. God knows the past, the present and the future.
6. **Omnipresence.** God is omnipresent or everywhere present. This relates to the attribute of immensity. Though God is immense in that He transcends space and is not limited by it. He is also omnipresent in every part of space. Here again we mention that pantheism is not the same as immensity or omnipresence. The Bible states that God fills the heaven and the earth. Jeremiah 23:24.

The last group of attributes refer to God's relationship with moral creatures, that is mankind.

7. **Veracity.** This refers to God's truthfulness and faithfulness. God cannot lie and will not desert those whom He has promised to protect. It is because of the truthfulness and faithfulness of God that we can have our hope and trust in Him. His Word is true. He keeps His promises. Thus 1:2 says that God cannot lie. And Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5 talks of God's faithfulness.
8. **Goodness.** God is good in His very nature. He is fundamentally good and ideally good. Hence He is the source of all good, and true ethical goodness stems from His. Mark 10:18 says, 'None is good save one, even God.'

9. **Mercy.** God is a compassionate God. His mercy is bountiful. His mercy is His goodness to all who need it regardless of who they are. Psalm 145:9 declares that God's tender mercy is over all His works.
10. **Righteousness.** The righteousness of God is related to His holiness. His righteousness is not related to any law outside of Himself. But rather, His righteousness is based within His very nature, and this is the standard for all other laws. Thus God's laws are from His nature and are righteousness. It is God's righteousness that demands His creation to adhere to His law. The Psalmist says in Psalm 11:7, 'The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. His countenance doth behold the upright/' God is infinitely righteous in Himself, and He maintains that righteousness by demanding it from His creation.
11. **Justice.** The justice of God is the attribute that punishes disobedience to the will of God. God's righteousness demands justice. In keeping with His holiness, He has to mete out just rewards to mankind whom He created. He is referred to as the judge of all the earth. Genesis 32:3 & 4.
12. **Love.** This oft times is called the central attribute of God. It is related to God's goodness. It is God's goodness and kindness to mankind culminating with the giving of His Son on the Cross of Calvary to save man from sin. His love is not satisfied with anything short of perfection. Yet He loves His rational creation, even sinful man, and has given the way to perfection through His Son. Thus we find in John 3:16 that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

## CONCLUSION

We cannot say that we can know all there is to know about God by knowing His attributes. But we do know, through the attributes revealed in the Bible, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, what we need to know about God. Apart from the revealed attributes of God in His Word we may not know anything of the Being of God. For natural theology shows little more than the fact that God does exist. And so, despite our human limitations, we can have some knowledge of the Bible of God through His revealed attributes. And therefore, the attributes are not just names without reality, but rather, essential qualities that reveal the Being of God. Let us thank God that He has not left us groping in darkness in order to find and know Him. But, on the other hand, let us utilize His revealed Word, the Bible, to know Him better, and to learn to love and obey Him.

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Grade.....

## QUESTIONS ON LESSON II

### GOD: HIS BEING & ATTRIBUTES

**Note:** Answers to the questions below are found in the lesson material. Read the lesson carefully before answering. Try to answer in your own words, as much as possible. Wherever necessary, just fill in the blanks, or choose the correct word. Print out this page if you like. If you wish to send in the answers or to write further comments, or ask any questions yourself, do so on a separate sheet of paper and put your name and student number in a prominent place.

## CHAPTER I

### THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

If you are a Christian, (or, presume you are a Christian) what evidences would you give to show that you know that God exists? Give the two evidences that can, not only prove God's existence, but can also lead a person to believe in Him.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD**

1. How could you know the Being of God in order to answer questions such as, What is God's nature?
2. List God's Absolute attributes under the headings of Spirituality, Infinity and Perfection.
3. God is not limited to time, space or any form of physical body. Describe these attributes.

4. We believe in God's unlimited power and knowledge. Describe three attributes that show these.
5. How can God be merciful and yet mete out justice to those who disobey Him? (Keep in mind His qualities of righteousness and justice).
6. Give the greatest possible proof that God is a God of love.
7. Somebody tells you about pantheism. Show them that this contradicts what the Bible says about God being a spirit.

Send answer sheets to:

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