



Living the Christian Life Bible Study

Lesson 7a (NIV)

Understanding God (Part 1 of 2)

Student's Name _____ **Unit** _____

Instructor _____

Comments _____

3.0 God's Non-relational Characteristics

The very first words in the Bible (Genesis 1:1) are, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* These ten simple words tell us a great deal about God. From them we learn that God existed before anything else existed, He created everything that exists, and that He had no beginning. The fact that He created everything that exists shows that He is incredibly powerful and intelligent. Imagine the power required to be able to create billions upon billions of stars where nothing had existed! And imagine the intelligence He must have to create the complexity of living beings, from the tiniest one-celled organisms to the largest animals. And then to create the delicately balanced environment in which they could all live in perfect harmony. This simple statement introduces us to the non-relational characteristics of God.

The Bible also tells us that there are certain characteristics of God that should be obvious from observing creation, Romans 1:20, *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

What qualities must God have to create everything that exists?

Another verse tells us of God's detail knowledge of what goes on in the world is Matt 10:29-30, *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

Do you think there is anything going on anywhere in the world that God does not know about? _____

What else does this show us about God? _____

Now read Psalm 139:13, *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

In addition to creating the physical universe and everything in the world when it began, what else does God create?

In the next lesson we will consider God's relational characteristics and the tri-unity of God.

1.0 Introduction

How does one begin to describe an infinite, eternal spirit who is utterly beyond our comprehension? Perhaps it is like trying to understand the ocean in all its vastness.

We can stand on the shore and see vast stretches of the ocean, we can fly over it and see even more. We can dip in and take a cup of ocean water and touch it, examine it, even taste it. If we did this in many places we would find that the blue water of the Pacific was different from the green water of the Caribbean, and that the frozen ice of the Arctic was different yet. So it is with God; we can keep learning for a lifetime and still be only standing on the shore of knowing all of who He is. But that should not keep us from beginning to understand Him.

When we are getting acquainted with a person, after learning his name, we first ask factual questions about his life; such as where he lives and works, and how big is his family. Then we get into questions related more to his personality: is he happy, funny, sad, intelligent, generous, and so on. So it is with God, we begin by learning some individual characteristics about Him. But when we come to learning about God, it is foolishness to even think we can *really* understand God because He is infinite (without limits) in all His characteristics, and we are finite (have fixed limits) in our ability to understand. But we can seek to understand Him to the limits of our comprehension. Furthermore, we can know Him relationally. Jesus taught us to pray to "our Father in heaven," implying a loving, protecting, and guiding relationship.

As we seek to know God, we find that, just like knowing a person, some characteristics have a great deal to do with how we relate to Him; His love, mercy, and even His anger. The reason we are able to relate to these characteristics is that we are created in His image and so, in a very small and imperfect way, we have some of the same characteristics.

Some other characteristics of God don't affect how we relate to Him; He is eternal, infinite, and knows all things. In these ways, we are not like Him, and have difficulty comprehending these characteristics. So as we try to learn about God, we will be describing Him in both relational and non-relational terms.

The importance of understanding the nature and character of God is well stated by A. W. Tozer in his book "The Knowledge of the Holy,"

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ... no people has ever risen above its religion, and ... no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or meaningless as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. ... the most important fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God."

1.0 Introduction (cont'd)

The Prophet Jeremiah also speaks of the importance of knowing God, (Jeremiah 9:23-24), *This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.*

In this lesson we are seeking to gain an understanding of the nature and character of God as described in the Bible.

2.0 God's Name

One of the first things to ask about God is, "What is His name?" because "God" isn't really a name, it is a descriptive term. God is the general term for deity, or anyone who claims divine power. The Hebrew word is *el* (singular) or *elohim* (plural), the meaning is "the mighty one." This shows that the primary characteristic expected of a god is that he be powerful. When used in the Bible with an initial capital letter - God - it refers to the true and living God of the Bible. When used with all lower case letters - god - it refers to idols; proclaimed to be god, but in reality having no divine characteristics.

On one occasion, Moses asked God what His name was. Exodus 3:13-14, *Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' "* By using the name "I am," He is saying that He is eternally self-existent and is independent of anything outside of Himself. By contrast, we are dependant, we need a mother and father to bring us into existence, then we need air, food, water, gravity and many other things to survive. God needs none of these.

The English equivalent of the Hebrew letters in "I am" is YHWH. This is pronounced Jehovah or Yahweh. In our English Bibles this name is printed as "LORD." (All capital letters) The reason it is written as LORD rather than Jehovah is that for many centuries before the time of Christ, the Jewish people, out of respect for their God, would not pronounce His name on their lips. This tradition has carried into the Old Testament of the Christian Bible by using the word LORD -so as to be sure they did not use His name in vain – to not break the third commandment.

The third way God is referred to in the Bible is "Lord." When spelled with an initial capital letter - Lord - it indicates a relationship of respect and obedience to God. This is a general term of great respect, sometimes translated master. When used with all lower case letters - lord - it speaks of a respectful relationship with another person. The Hebrew word is *adoni*.