

Pastor Paul Bawden
Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, September 13, 2009
Beginning of Series – “The Only God To Believe In”
“God – Who Is He?”

A Sunday School teacher asked her class of boys and girls who God was. One little fellow raised his hand, and said, “A great big Presbyterian minister.”

We smile at that comment, but it reminds us that it’s easy to put God on our level, or to make Him out to be something that He isn’t.

In 1961, J.B. Phillips wrote a book entitled, “Your God Is Too Small.” He considered ideas about God such as “A Resident Policeman,” “Parental Hangover,” “Grand Old Man,” “Meek & Mild,” “God In A Box,” “Managing Editor,” “Projected Image,” along with other ideas.”

In 2006, Larry Crabb wrote a book called the “The Papa Prayer, The Prayer You Have Never Prayed.” In this book, Crabb uses the Acrostic PAPA to teach that prayer should first of all be a relationship with God: P- Present yourself to God without pretense. A – Attend to how you are thinking about God. P-Purge yourself of anything blocking your relationship with God. A-Approach God as “the first thing” in your life.

But then he talks about images or that we may have of God:
 “Smiling Buddy,” “Backroom Watchmaker,” “Preoccupied King,” “Vending Machine,” “Stern Patriarch,” “Kindly Grandfather,” “Impersonal Force,” “Cruel Tyrant,” “Moral Crusader,” and “Romantic Lover.”

I’m not sure what comes to your mind when you think about God and when you pray to God, but I trust it is not one of these.

But it’s easy if we are not careful to have ideas of God that are distorted by virtue of our experiences.

In fact today, the popular idea is to put God on our level so that we can do what we want and there is no accountability involved.

According to C.S. Lewis there has been a switch regarding who God is.

C.S. Lewis has penned,
“The ancient man approached God (or even gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: god is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defence for being the god who permits war, poverty, and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God’s acquittal But the important thing is that Man is on the Bench and God is on the Dock.”

This description of man couldn’t have been said better (and it was written in 1970), as we watch what is happening to God in our society in regard to human behavior and how He affects the affairs in our nation and world.

Of course, then, there are others who deny the existence of God altogether like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens, who have been called the unholy trinity. Everything in their thinking depends upon their reason and science. They start with man and end with man, which is really a very closed minded way to live.

But as we see different challenges being brought against God today, and with changes taking place in our own society regarding what is right and what is wrong, I thought it would be to our benefit for this fall to start where all theology, where a word about God starts, with God Himself, called Theology Proper.

In so doing, as we study God and who He is and what He is like, we immediately have to come to grips with His attributes, or those characteristics which are part of His person or nature, that which is intrinsic to His very being.

By way of introduction, it is well to just touch on how the characteristics of God are usually described.

1. Non-communicable attributes (characteristics). Those that have no counter part in man.

- 1) Simplicity – John 4:24 – God is Spirit – The only substance in God’s nature.
- 2) Unity – Deuteronomy 6:4 – God is one – referring to number not essence.
- 3) Infinity – I Kings 8:27 – God’s limitlessness, boundlessness.
- 4) Eternity – Psalm 90:2 – Time without beginning and end.
- 5) Immutable – James 1:17 – God is unchanging, never developing.
- 6) Omnipresent – Psalm 139:7ff – God is everywhere at the same time.
- 7) Sovereignty – Ephesians 1:11 – He works out everything after the counsel of His own will – everything will go His way.

2. Communicable attributes (characteristics). Those that have some counter part in man.

- 1) Omniscience – (Intellect) Isaiah 40:13-14; 45:9-10; Psalm 139:2-4; God knows everything actual and possible – We have the ability to think in limited ways.
- 2) Holiness (Sensibility) I Peter 1:16; I John 1:5) God is the standard for conduct. We have some understanding of that, although tainted by sin.
- 3) Justice (Sensibility) Psalm 89:14 – God is no respecter of persons. He has moral equity. We can also act that way in a limited way.
- 4) Love (Sensibility) Romans 5:8; I John 4:8 – God seeks the highest good in the object loved.
- 5) Truth (Sensibility) John 14:6; Hebrews 6:18 – God is always in agreement with Himself in what He thinks, says, and does. He is the Truth, the absolute standard. We can also speak truth but we are not the standard.
- 6) Righteous (Sensibility) Daniel 9:14 – God never contradicts Himself. He always does what is in accord with His character. We can do what is right, sensitive to others’ needs.
- 7) Will (Will) Isaiah 40:13-14; Romans 9:18 – God is independent of everything else of Himself. He is not obligated to do anything for us, unless He obligates Himself. We have a certain amount of freedom that God has given us.
- 8) Omnipotent (Will) Revelation 19:6 – God has all ability in Himself to created and preserve His world. He gives us energy to do certain things, and carry out our tasks.

These give us some idea of what the biblical God is like which of course remind us that He is certainly the true and living God, yes, the unique God.

That’s why today we ask the question, “Who Is He?” Who is this God who has revealed Himself to us in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the written word of God? Why is He the unique God? Why can I say that?

I. The biblical God is unique in His existence.

1. He is unique in His person (John 4:24).

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

God is Spirit. What does that mean?

(1) What it doesn’t mean that God is Spirit.

It doesn’t mean that God is like some ghost or phantom, or the figment of one’s imagination. He is not something that we can conjure up on our own. He is not anything that we can put on paper and say, “Here is God.” Although people try to do that in different ways today.

Which means that a spirit does not have flesh and bones as we have.

Jesus told His disciples when he appeared to them in Jerusalem when they thought they were seeing a spirit, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is Myself; touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke

(2) What does it mean that God is Spirit?

God is spirit refers to the reality that God is a being, yes, He is a person. He is personality.

Before creating man, God said, “Let us make man in our image, and in our likeness’ (Genesis 1:26). God’s image

and likeness obviously doesn't consist in man's body which was formed from earthly matter, but in His spirit, His intellectual, emotional, and volitional capacities. Man would be given these capacities in his spirit.

God is non-material, and that is why God speaks against idolatry, which are all material created things.

Deuteronomy 4:14-15 reads, "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, and that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female." Then the text goes on to talk about any animal, any bird, any thing that creeps on the ground, or a fish in the water, or worship of the sun, moon, or stars.

In other words the creation of God was not to become an idol, take the place of God, who is Spirit, who is a person, with intellect, emotion, and will.

God is Spirit. He is a person with mind, emotion, and will. Since God is Spirit- an immaterial person, can he be seen. Is He visible somehow.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mt that "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

Some have thought this may refer to Christ, but I take it to refer to God, the Father. Perhaps in our new bodies in heaven with the sin nature removed we will be able to see God the Father, since we will be in the eternal dimension of life. Something to think about

As God is unique in His existence,

2. He is unique in His nature (His essence) – (Deuteronomy 6:4).

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one."

This verse is called the "Shema" from the first word, Hear. It became Israel's Confession of Faith. There is two ideas here in the word, one.

The idea in verse 4 is not just that Yahweh is the only God, but that He is also one unified person.

"It is possible to understand verse 4 in several ways, but the two most popular renderings of the final clause are: (1) 'The LORD our God, the LORD is one' (so NIV) or (2) 'The LORD our God is one LORD.' The former stresses the uniqueness or exclusivity of Yahweh as Israel's God and so may be paraphrased 'Yahweh our God is the one and only Yahweh' or the like. This takes the noun *'ehad* ('one') in the sense of 'unique' or 'solitary,' a meaning that is certainly well attested.

The latter translation (The LORD our God is One LORD) focuses on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – unity in the plurality - (The word, one –Echad – is used when **Genesis 2:24** where it states that Adam and Eve became one flesh). Representing the unity of a group of people is used in **Genesis 11:6**, speaking of humanity before the Tower of Babel: "The LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.'"

In Numbers 14:15, the assembly of the Israelites is referred to "as one man": "Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say.") Obviously, there is plurality in the unity.

At the same time the word, one, functions here as a witness to the self-consistency of Yahweh who is not ambivalent and who has a single purpose or objective for creation and history. The ideas clearly overlap to provide an unmistakable basis for monotheistic faith. Yahweh is indeed a unity, but beyond that he is the only God

God, then is not just the only unique absolute God but He is also the absolute composite One, the Unified Person.

Of course, as mentioned above, such opens the way for the Trinity or Triunity which is suggested in the word, God (Elohim, which is plural in form), and then LORD, Yahweh, which is another name for God, but is applied to Jesus Christ in John 1:23, as John the Baptist quotes from Isaiah 40:3.

The Trinity, of course, is certainly implied in the Old Testament as in the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and earth. And then when God created man He said, "Let us make man in our image and according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Later the prophecy of Christ is given in full in Isaiah 9:6 – that He would be the given son (implying preexistence). He would be the mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. The Spirit of God was involved in creation (Genesis 1:2).

When we come to the New Testament it is clear at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 13-17). that God the Father speaks from heaven saying that this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, Christ is being baptized, and the Spirit of God descends on Christ like a dove.

The uniqueness and unity of the God in His existence as one God existing in three persons, sets the biblical God apart from all other gods concocted by man. That's why all the cults and world religions have no Trinity, and deny Trinity. Satan doesn't want the uniqueness of the biblical God to be known and taught. Regardless the biblical God is unique in His Person and in His nature.

That's why God said through Isaiah, "For I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me" (Isaiah 46:9).

II. The biblical God is unique from all other gods (Isaiah 43:11;44:6; 45:6).

1.In the days of the Old & New Testament.

(1) Sin moon god (Babylonian god)

Other names for Sin were Suen and Nanna. Addressed in prayer as 'perfect in lordiness', Sin was associated with fertility, 'lord of the cowherders', the nether world, and kingship

As the moon god, he is the first son of Enlil, the Sumerian god of earth and air. As 'lord of the calendar', his cult exhibited monotheistic tendencies, since it was Sin 'who determines the destinies of distant days' and whose 'plans no god knows.'

2) Egyptian gods.

The Enned, the Egyptian Counsel Of The Nine Osirian gods

Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys.

Atum was the first who created himself (or arose out of Nu, the primal nothingness) and who created Shu and Tefnut from either his spittle or his blood. From their union came Geb and Nut. Their children, the great-grandchildren of Atum, were the first gods of earth: Osiris and Isis, and Set and Nephthys. From those four were all the pharaohs and many of the gods descended

3) Baal god

The word **Baalim** is the Hebrew plural for **BAAL, the pagan god of nature and fertility**. The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible has this to say in an article on **BAAL**.

"... Baal worship apparently had its origin in the belief that every tract of ground owed its productivity to a supernatural being, or baal, that dwelt there. The farmers probably thought that from the Baalim, or fertility gods, of various regions came the increase of crops, fruit and cattle ... The worship of Baal was accompanied with lascivious rites (1 Kings 14:24), the sacrifice of children in the fire by parents (Jer.19:5), and kissing the image (1 Kings 19:18; Hos 13:2). Baal was often associated with the goddess Astoreth (Judg.2:13), and in the vicinity of his altar there was often an Asherah. (Judg.6:30; 1 Kings 16:32-33,R.V.)"

Of the goddess ASTORETH the same dictionary says:

"... She was the goddess of sexual love, maternity and fertility. Prostitution as a religious rite in the service of this goddess under various names is widely attested. The identification of 'Ashtart with Aphrodite is evidence of her sexual character."

"Ashtaroth (plural of Astoreth). In connection with the plural of Baal, a general designation for the female divinities of the Canaanites ..."

"Asherah refers to a wooden pole or mast which stood at Canaanite places of worship (Exo.34:13); originally it was, perhaps, the trunk of a tree with branches chopped off, and was regarded as the wooden symbol of the goddess Asherah, who like Ashtoreth, was a type of fertility ... It was erected beside the altar of Baal. (Judg 6:25, 28)"

4) Greek gods

The most significant ones in Greek mythology, Greek polytheism, are the twelve Olympian Gods:

1. Aphrodite ,the goddess of love **2. Apollo** , the god of the sun and of music **3. Ares** , the god of war **4. Artemis** , the goddess of the hunt **5. Demeter** , the goddess of the harvest **6. Athena** ,the goddess of wisdom **7. Dionysos** , the god of high spirits and of wine **8. Hephaestus** , the god of fire and of the forge **9. Hera** ,the queen of gods **10. Hermes** ,the god of travel and the messenger of the gods **11. Poseidon** ,the god of the sea **12. Zeus** ,the lord of the gods, most powerful and ruler of Mount Olympus and the sky

Those twelve gods, blessed with powers and cursed with human emotions like love and anger. For example Zeus, in Greek Dias, is famous for his love affairs with semi-goddesses and mortals, which always caused the envy of his wife Hera. Their residence has been atop the Mount Olympus, the highest mountain of Greece, from which derives also their characteristic name, Olympian Gods. The twelve ancient Greek gods apart from human feelings, has also human needs. For their conservation nutrition was required, and ancient Greeks believed that they only consumed nectar and ambrosia, as these were considered rare and divine! Another characteristic of the Olympian twelve gods was their immortality.

Each one of them has the ability to appear in front of mortals and provide them with advice and help. Many examples of that can be found in the Iliad and Odyssey, works of the poet Homer. In them many time god Athena appears in various forms to Odysseys, as she has been his protector. It is not rare of course to see the opposite. Some of the ancient Greek gods to get angry with the mortals and try to harm or punish them.

5) Roman gods

- Apollo - god of the sun, poetry, music, and oracles.
- Bona Dea - goddess of fertility, healing, virginity, and women. Also known as Fauna
- Bacchus - god of wine, sensual pleasures, and truth.
- Carmenta - goddess of childbirth and prophecy, and assigned a flamen minor. The leader of the Camenae.
- Ceres - goddess of the harvest and mother of Proserpina, and a Dii Consentes, and assigned a flamen minor
- Cybele - earth mother
- Diana - goddess of the hunt, the moon, virginity, and childbirth, twin sister of Apollo and a Dii Consentes
- Flora - goddess of flowers, and assigned a flamen minor
- Fortuna - goddess of fortune
- Janus - two-headed god of beginnings and endings and of doors
- Juno - Queen of the Gods and goddess of matrimony, and a Dii Consentes
- Jupiter - King of the Gods and the storm, air, and sky god, father of Venus, and a Dii Consentes, and assigned a flamen maior
- Mars - god of war and father of Romulus, the founder of Rome, lover of Venus, and a Dii Consentes, and

assigned a flamen Maior

- Mercury - messenger of the gods and bearer of souls to the underworld, and a Dii Consentes(Hermes)
- Minerva - goddess of wisdom and war, and a Dii Consentes
- Neptune - god of the sea, earthquakes, and horses, and a Dii Consentes
- Ops - goddess of plenty
- Pluto - Pluto a name given to him by the Romans from Greek myths, he is the King of the Dead, and of the underworld.
- Pomona - goddess of fruit trees, and assigned a flamen minor.
- Portunes - god of keys, doors, and livestock, he was assigned a flamen minor.
- Proserpina - Queen of the Dead and a grain-goddess
- Quirinus - Romulus, the founder of Rome, was deified as Quirinus after his death. Quirinus was a war god and a god of the Roman people and state, and was assigned a flamen maior.
- Saturn - a titan, god of harvest and agriculture, the father of Jupiter, Neptune, Juno, and Pluto
- Venus - goddess of love and beauty, mother of the hero Aeneas, and a Dii Consentes
- Vesta - goddess of the hearth and the Roman state, and a Dii Consentes
- Volturnus- god of water, was assigned a flamen minor.
- Vulcan - god of the forge, fire, and blacksmiths, husband to Venus, and a Dii Consentes, and assigned a flamen minor
- Uranus - god of the sky before Jupiter. Based on the greek Ouranos.

2. From the days of the New Testament to our day.

It has been suggested that there are some 42 different beliefs in our world today. I list some of them below.

- 1) **Jehovah's Witnesses**
- 2) **Mormons**
- 3) **Church of Christ, Scientist**
- 4) **Unity School of Christianity**
- 5) **Church of Scientology**
- 6) **Unification Church**
- 7) **The Way International**
- 8) **International Church of Christ**
- 9) **Judaism**
- 10) **Native American Religions**
- 11) **Hinduism**
- 12) **Buddhism**
- 13) **Islam**
- 14) **Sikhism**
- 15) **Baha'i World Faith**
- 16) **Secular Humanism**
- 17) **New Age Movement**
- 18) **Atheism**
- 19) **Confucianism**
- 20) **Deism**
- 21) **Gnosticism**
- 22) **Mormonism (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)**
- 23) **New Thought**

- 24) Shinto
- 25) Spiritualism, a.k.a. Spiritism
- 26) Stoicism
- 27) Taoism
- 28) Unitarian Universalism
- 29) Wicca
- 30) Zoroastrianism

3. The biblical God is Spirit (personality) and is one (in His nature) - in eternity and time.

He is a Person and He is one in His nature, totally different from all the other gods man has developed down through time to our day. There is no comparison of Him to the other gods considered above. He makes His unchanging revelation of Himself in the midst of all the other idols of man. He is the true and Living God! He is the ONE within the many. He has made the revelation of Himself in the midst of the idolatry of men.

He is existing always as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons in ONE God totally unique from all other gods. The biblical God is totally unique from the other gods created by men. No pictures or ideas of man can portray or describe Him.

III. The biblical God is unique in what He does.

1. He creates (Genesis 1:1-2).

Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God created the heavens and earth.

He creates out of nothing. He speaks and there is light. He also uses existing material to create. He created man and woman. He said that it was all good, in accordance with His will.

2. He redeems (Mark 10:45; Ephesians 1:7).

When man sinned against God (Genesis 3), who took the initiative to restore the relationship? Not Adam and Eve, for they hid from God full of guilt. God came offering His forgiveness and grace, as He caused Adam and Eve to admit their guilt. The first announcement about the coming redemption in Christ was made in Genesis 3:15.

The Redeemer was prophesied who came, was born of a woman, Mary, and said that He came not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

On the cross, Jesus represented you and me, and paid the penalty for our breaking God's law which is death, He was buried, and rose again the third day. Now we know that the penalty for sin has been paid and we who were once enemies of God can now be His friend through faith. It's called reconciliation – being changed by the power of God's Spirit as we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ to be our Savior (Romans 5:10-11). I trust you know what it means to be reconciled to God through faith in Christ. Any one who is in Christ is a new creation – God gives us His life, He comes to live in us spiritually. If so then,

3. He indwells (I John 4:15; I John 1:1-7).

The believer in Jesus Christ is inhabited by God who is Spirit. John in his first letter penned, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God" (I John 4:15). In addition, Christ lives in the believer spiritually (Colossians 1:27), and the Holy Spirit lives in the believer spiritually (I Corinthians 6:19).

An amazing reality, no matter how many times we have heard it said. The personal invisible, immaterial God, lives spiritually in the life of every believer in Jesus Christ. No other god of man can do that Satan may control people, even inhabit them, but not for a godly purpose, only to bring glory to himself, which is totally opposed to the true and living God. Is inhabitation of people is only temporary – not permanent.

God indwells the believer so that He can have fellowship with the believer and the believer can have fellowship with Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth (I John 1:1-78).

4. He empowers (Galatians 5:16).

God indwells the believer in Christ for a purpose. Walk in the Spirit and we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. This is true so that He can serve the Lord in all that he does and in so doing by relying on the Holy Spirit's

presence, God can be shown off in His life, or God can be glorified.

Now what man lost in the garden of Eden in sinning against God, to be able to glorify God, now through faith in Jesus Christ, the believer in renewed fellowship with God and glorify Him in all that He thinks, says, and does. Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31).

5. He rewards (Hebrews 11:6).

One of the rewards of knowing Christ is the living hope He gives us that someday we will be with Him forever after this life. Yes, and the biblical God does not forget the believer who lives in the power of the Holy Spirit serving Him in all that He does. Anyone who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

The biblical God is unique in what He does as He creates, redeems, indwells empowers, and rewards those who know Him personally through faith in Jesus Christ.

IV. The biblical God is unique in His desire for and demand of us (I John 5:21). What do I mean by that?

It is interesting as John in his first letter talks so clearly and practically about what it means to live for Jesus Christ, for God, in a world that is completely opposed to the biblical God, that then John closes his letter with these profound yet simple words,

“Little children keep (guard be watchful - a command once for all) yourself from idols”(I John 5:21).

Why does John end his first letter this way? John directed by the Spirit of God knows the heart of the biblical God who is Spirit, who is the eternal person who dwells in heaven.

He knows that God is searching for worshippers, those who give Him first place in their lives. And He knows when He isn't kept the first priority in our lives, we become idolaters, we substitute for HIM, other things, like our reason, our possessions, our friends, our time, what we watch, our energy, what we do, what we want, apathy that creeps into our lives, all keep us from letting Him have the first place in our lives. Yes, some call it the idolatry of the good life, where we forget that following the Lord takes denying our selfishness, and taking up the cross daily and following the Lord.

Really, God is telling us through John that I love you and I don't want you to become involved in that which would cause you to lose your fellowship and passion for me, and end up a spiritual casualty – glorifying yourself and the devil.

That's why God gave to Israel that first and second commandment that He should be the only one in their lives, and not to make unto Him any graven image, any idol, anything material to represent the immaterial living eternal and personal God who is Spirit.

Idolatry was out, for it meant that Israel would lose their love for God and end up a spiritual casualty. Well, they let God's blessings cause them to forget God, and then floated into idolatry, and eventually had to go into captivity because of their blatant rejection of God.

So the challenge to each of us today, when we consider the uniqueness of the biblical God is this, “Do I have any idols in my life?” This also includes am I trying to live for God and hold unto an idol in my life? This is what Israel was doing as well, syncretism it is called – one foot for God, one foot for my idol. You can't serve both, you will either hate one or love the other.

There is tale that comes from India that goes like this:

Four royal brothers decided each to master a special ability. Time went by, and the brothers met to reveal what they had learned.

"I have mastered a science," said the first, "by which I can take but a bone of some creature and create the flesh that goes with it."

"I," said the second, "know how to grow that creature's skin and hair if there is flesh on its bones."

The third said, "I am able to create its limbs if I have flesh, the skin, and the hair."

"And I," concluded the fourth, "know how to give life to that creature if its form is complete."

Thereupon the brothers went into the jungle to find a bone so they could demonstrate their specialities.

In their pursuit, the bone they found was a lion's. One added flesh to the bone, the second grew hide and hair, the third completed it with matching limbs, and the fourth gave the lion life.

Shaking its mane, the ferocious beast arose and jumped on his creators. He killed them all and vanished contentedly into the jungle.

We too have the capacity to create what can devour us. Goals and dreams can consume us.

Possessions, property, the good life which all it offers us, can turn and destroy us—

Unless we first seek God's kingdom and righteousness, and allow the God who is Spirit breathe into what we make of life.

May the biblical God who is Spirit always have first place in our lives so we keep worshipping Him while guarding our hearts from idols!