

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

There are some circumstances occurring in everyday life which reinforce the need for a firm foundation in simple and basic Bible doctrine. One such instance happened for me the other day. After the late evening news, instead of turning the television off, I flipped the channel over to our local Public Broadcasting Station. A late night commentator was interviewing an author who had written a book on why civilizations decline. In no way am I trying to be critical of this author or the broadcast, but sometimes I think we're just too smart for our own good. His basic conclusion, if I understood him correctly, was that societies perish because they don't take care of their environment. While this makes total sense in the natural, it omits some basic spiritual factors. I kept thinking if this man had a firm foundation in basic Bible principles, he might have come to a more serious conclusion. He cited many examples—all of them good—as to why societies should take care of their natural resources—and, of course, I wholeheartedly agreed with him. It is imperative we take care of what God has given us. It was when he made a note of the Vikings and Inuit-type natives that the missing piece of his puzzle became evident.

Last month we looked at the basics of how God raises up a people to His code of moral laws from childhood. One of the basics principles was in taking care of the land and livestock management as well as sanitation concerns. Another principle was how we treat one another—those within our community and those outside of it—as well as how we evangelize. We didn't have the space to go into those basic principles last month, but the book of Leviticus as well as the New Testament is full of examples. This specific author cited the Christianity of the Vikings as the reason for their own decline. In a way he was right—it was their own specific 'brand' of Christianity which caused their extinction. But to say it was the Christianity of the Bible as the cause is totally inaccurate. When these Vikings settled in a harsh, cold climate, the only food source was what the natives ate. Because these natives were pagan, the Vikings would not learn from them or have anything to do with them. Unfortunately, their narrow view of the Scriptures prevented them from learning how the natives survived. As a result they died. If this author had known basic Bible principles, he would have known these Vikings were not following God's principles when they would not speak to the pagan natives. While being very religious, their morality was not New Testament Christianity and they paid the price for it. He failed to mention a similar set of circumstances when the Puritans settled in America. They followed the Scripture in principle a bit more closely and did dialogue with the native Indians. They did it to evangelize as well as to learn from them. Those natives saved the lives of the

Puritans by teaching them what to grow and how to live in their new land.

That brings me to the piece of the puzzle I believe this man missed. When we follow the basic principles laid out in the Scriptures we take care of our environment. We care for our livestock. We guard and properly make use of our natural resources. We treat people with respect while we defend ourselves from evil spiritual forces and their practices among people with the word of God. It's when a society leaves the principles of the Bible that a society eventually perishes by misusing its environment, abusing its livestock, people and natural resources. That is true for Jews and Christians as well as those who do not believe the Bible is the written word of God for mankind. It may be hard for some to realize this, but God gives people, animals and natural resources as gifts for mankind. Let me cite two extremes. Albert Einstein was as much of a gift to the earth as let's say a financier like J.P. Morgan. In more modern times we could use other examples. It's possible none of these men knew Jesus Christ as their personal savior, nor did they always act with Christian thought and behavior. Yet each in his own way used what God gave them to bless others. I am not saying these men were perfect—history tells us they were not. But they did display an attribute of blessing mankind in some way with the gifts God gave them. In that sense they displayed a part of God's character and nature.

This month we will take a look at the character and nature of God. It's because of His character and nature that He commands us concerning resources and people He has placed on the planet. As was the case last month, our study subject is enormous and our typewritten space is limited. So I would encourage those of you who want to know more to study on your own. I can recommend some good resource books, if you will click on the contact-us link on this page. Let's begin by settling a question many who are not raised in Christianity trip up over: The fact God is One Supreme, Eternal Being with three distinct personalities. Many say we have three gods. This is totally inaccurate. The common examples of water and the sun have helped many to understand this better. Water can be a gas as in steam. It can be a liquid. It can be frozen solid as ice, yet all three forms are still water. The sun gives off light, heat and energy. They are all different but still we know they are produced from the sun. Light itself carries three extremes making up what we see as light: white light, ultraviolet and infrared. As humans we have a body, a soul and a spirit, yet you are still one person. While none of these examples are perfect representations of the One true God who expresses Himself in the Old and New Testaments, they can help us understand how God can be three distinct personalities, yet One God. If I take three characteristics of what God is—any true and living God—and prove to you from the Bible God, the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son and the Holy Spirit have all three of these characteristics, then all three must

be distinct personalities of the One Eternal God—who, by the way has named Himself as Yahveh. This Hebrew word is translated as Lord in most Bibles. We will have to study the names God gives Himself later. For now, let's look to the Scriptures.

Any being claiming to be God must have three distinct characteristics. The first is to be omnipresent, eternal or ever-present. We see this listed of the Holy Spirit, Jesus and God the Father in the following Scriptures: John 14:16; Romans 8:27; Hebrews 13:8; Hebrews 7:3; John 8:58; Micah 5:2; John 1:1-18; 17: 5; Deuteronomy 4:39; Psalm 139:8; Proverbs 15:3; Isaiah 66:1; Jeremiah 23:24; Acts 17:27. The second attribute or characteristic must be that He is omniscient, in other words, all knowing or infallible. Here are some Scriptures which describe the Holy Spirit, Jesus, as well as the Father as omniscient: 1 John 2:27; John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:24; John 2:24; 16:30; 21:17; Job 26:6; 31:4; 34:21; Psalm 147:5; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20. The third 'God attribute' would be omnipotence or a being that was all powerful, who creates life and can raise up from the dead. Here are the Scriptures concerning the Spirit, the Son and the Father: John 6:63; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:11; Matthew 28:18; Luke 8:25; John 10:17, 18; Acts 10:38; Romans 1:4; Isaiah 63:1; 1 Chronicles 29:12; 2 Chronicles 25:8; Psalm 62:11; Job 42:2; Isaiah 43:13; Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37; Romans 16:25-27. As you can see from these passages, there really is only one entity claiming all three of these attributes in all the religions of the world, and that being is the God of the Bible.

The Bible states the Holy Spirit is God: Acts 5:3, 4; Romans 8:9. Jesus Christ is God: Colossians 2:9 and that the Father is God: Psalm 68:5; Ephesians 4:6. The Bible also tells us God does not lie (Numbers 23:19) because it is impossible for Him to lie (Hebrews 6:18) and that Christ is truth (John 14:6; 16:13) and that the Spirit is truth (John 14:17; 1 John 5:6). We see Jesus, the Father and the Spirit are one (John 14:9-11; 15:26; 16:5, 7). We also see Jesus glorifies the Father and the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 17:1, 5; John 16:14). Here are some other attributes of God: He is good, righteous and just, compassionate, faithful, holy, everlasting, sacrificial, unchangeable, merciful, gracious and loving. Here are the corresponding Scriptures: Psalm 25:8, Psalm 33:5, Psalm 103:13, Deuteronomy 7:9, Exodus 15:11, Psalm 90:2, John 3:16, Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 2:13, Psalm 84:11, Psalm 36:5. He is perfect even though He can still get angry and jealous when it comes to His people (Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 18:30, Ecclesiastes 3:14, Matthew 5:48, Psalm 7:11, Exodus 20:5).

Four of the most interesting Scripture verses to read concerning some of the attributes of God are centered on four conclusions stating that God 'IS.' Here are the four statements and the corresponding Scripture verses: GOD IS LIGHT (1

John 1:5); GOD IS A SPIRIT (John 4:24); GOD IS LOVE (1 John 4:16); GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE (Hebrews 12:29). The first observation one can make from the original language that these Scriptures were written in is that God defines what these things are as opposed to these defining Him, though to some extent they can. They are facts stated concerning God as the creator of these things and this is why they exist. When you think about it, there can be no life on earth without light from some source. There is no life in us without a spirit. Life holds no meaning or sustenance without love and without fire as a source for energy we really could not exist on many levels. While God defines what these things became for us, they also let us know something about Him. As you ponder each of these four items, think about how they relate to God and define Him. It should keep you thinking for a little while.

We could write whole books on this subject, but our space is limited. I encourage you to keep studying on your own. God made each one of us to be a gift to our own environments—an image of Him to our neighborhoods. Don't hide that image. Encourage someone with the character and nature of God in your neighborhood and watch the change it makes. Log on next month for more.....