

Lesson 1

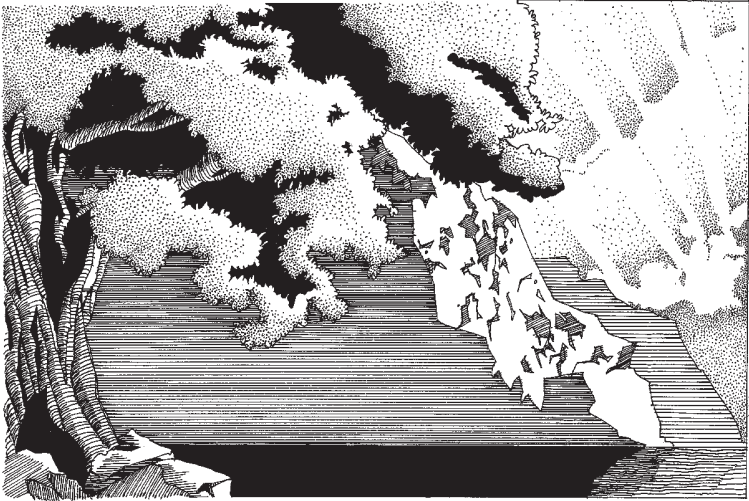
God: His Nature and Natural Characteristics

To the ancient questions, “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7), we may respond, “No!” The great problem we face in our efforts to understand God is that finite man cannot comprehend the Infinite!

Apart from the revelation we have of God’s nature and characteristics or attributes, we have no way of knowing the Being of God. Only as He reveals Himself in His nature and characteristics may we have some knowledge of His divine Being. Thus, what He has revealed of Himself is an accurate but partial disclosure of His Being.

We may also know God as He enters into relationships with us. We gain our knowledge of Him by studying His nature and characteristics, for these reveal aspects of His Being. In order to gain completely trustworthy knowledge of the divine nature and characteristics, we must begin with the study of God’s revelation of Himself in the Scriptures. While we may gain some general knowledge of God as we behold His works in nature, we must turn to the Word to receive an understanding of His nature and characteristics.

As you study about our Creator, may you appreciate more fully that it was His concern for you which led to His progressive self-revelation through the ages. This self-revelation reached its fullness as He spoke with finality in His Son (Hebrews 1:2).



lesson outline

God's Nature

God's Natural Attributes

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- Define and discuss qualities of God's nature and the natural attributes of God.
- Explain how knowledge of the natural attributes of God can increase a person's faith in God.
- Appreciate the qualities and attributes of God that make it possible for Him to know about and provide for our every need.

learning activities

1. Read carefully the course introduction and course objectives.
2. Study the lesson outline and lesson objectives. These will help you identify the things you should learn as you study the lesson.

3. Read the lesson and do the exercises in the lesson development. Check your answers with those given at the end of the lesson. It is very important that you find and read all Scripture texts given.
4. In this lesson there are many terms that may be new to you. Some of them are listed on this page as *key words*. Be sure to check the glossary at the end of this study guide for definitions of any key words you do not understand. Many are also defined within the lesson. Use your dictionary to find definitions for other words you may not know.
5. Take the self-test at the end of this lesson and check your answers carefully with those provided at the back of this study guide. Review any items you answer incorrectly.

key words

attributes	immutable	simplicity
distinct	manifestations	sovereign
distinctions	material	substance
essence	matter	substantial
eternal	omnipotence	Trinity
eternity	omnipresence	uniqueness
immaterial	omniscience	unity
immortal		

lesson development

GOD'S NATURE

As scientists study the composition of blood, they discover that it is made up of different substances and tiny particles that have separate functions in maintaining life. This complex liquid is pumped through an intricate network of tubes all day and all night by a sturdy machine (the heart) that rests after each movement. Blood is the life stream of the body. It carries oxygen and food to every part of the body, it fights germs that may enter the body, and it helps the

body get rid of wastes. To do these things requires the cooperation of the lungs, the kidneys, and other organs, in addition to the heart.

This is but one example of the many, highly organized, biological systems that make life possible. Surely, it took a Being of great power and intelligence to bring this about. What do we know about this Being? Let's look at some facts we know about our Creator, God.

God Is a Personal Being

Objective 1. *Choose a statement which gives qualities of personality that are seen in God.*

What would you say are the essential parts of a person? Arms? Voice? Eyes? If an individual loses any of these things, he is still a person. Probably we would agree that a *person* is something other than a *body*. A person is one who has the capacity to think, to feel, and to decide. Although God has no body, He certainly has intelligence and the ability to think, feel, and reason. The Bible reveals that He *communicates* with others (Psalm 25:14) and He is affected by their response to Him (Isaiah 1:14). He *thinks* (Isaiah 55:8) and He *makes decisions* (Genesis 2:18). These are all characteristics of a personal being. So, God is a personal Being.

We can learn something about the personality of God as we consider the personality of man, since man is created in the image of God. This approach has its limitations, of course. We must not consider man's personality as the standard by which we measure the personality of God. *For the original model of personality is found in God, not man.* Man's personality is but a pattern of the original. Man's personality is not identical with God's, but it contains traces of similarity to His. Thus, what appears as imperfect in man's personality exists in perfection in God's.

If you have an acquaintance who never lets you know what he feels, never shares his thoughts with you, and never shows any interest in you, you could say that he is *impersonal*. That is,

he does not express the characteristics of personality to you. But God is not this way. He is interested in you. He has feelings about people, and He communes with them. Moreover, He makes decisions concerning them.

Many people believe that the supreme Being who created the earth is far removed from human affairs; they believe that the spirits of ancestors or of nature have much more to do with people from day to day than God does. This, of course, is a misconception—God *is* concerned about human affairs, and He does relate to us in a personal way.

1 What concept of God is held by the people of your community?

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2 If God is a Person, how do you suppose you can get to know Him in a personal way? Use your notebook for this answer.

- 3 (Choose the correct completion.) The qualities of God which demonstrate His personality are His
- a) physical, social, and spiritual attributes.
 - b) ability to think, feel, and make decisions.
 - c) ability to be approached, seen, and fully understood.

God Is Spirit

Objective 2. *Select statements which correctly explain the spiritual nature of God.*

Of what do you think when you close your eyes and try to imagine what God is like? If some kind of image forms in your mind, your thinking is not entirely as the Scriptures teach. God has no form whatsoever because He is *spirit* (John 4:24), and a spirit is invisible. John 1:18 tells us that “No one has ever seen God.”

God is spirit! Here in a word we have a statement telling us what God is. In order to understand this statement, we must consider what it is to be *spirit*. What does *spirituality*, or the quality of being *spirit*, involve? This is not an easy concept to explain. As we have said earlier, the Bible gives us a *partial* disclosure of the nature of God. As we endeavor to describe His spiritual nature, we may use terms that are new to you. We will make an effort to define each of these words as we come to them.

1. Our search in Scripture reveals first that God has a unique, substantial being which is distinct from the world (Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1: 15-17). To be *unique* means to be the only one. To be *substantial* means to have *substance*, or an *essential nature*, to have *essence*. The terms *substance* and *essence* are very similar when used about God. They refer to all the qualities or attributes which make up His nature and which are the basis of all His outward manifestations.

2. This substantial being which is God is *invisible*, *immaterial*, and is *composed of no parts*. We have already said that God has substance, but He is not a *material* substance—that is, He is not composed of matter, as we are. God is a *spiritual* substance. Jesus said, “A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). Since God is spirit in the purest sense of the word, He does not have the limitations that come to mind when we think of a human being. He has none of the properties or characteristics which belong to matter. Paul describes Him as “the King eternal, immortal, invisible” (1 Timothy 1:17), and as “the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6: 15-16).

If God is indeed spirit and invisible, then how do we understand the instances in the Bible, such as described in Exodus 33:19-23, in which we are told that Moses *saw* God? This really is not a contradiction of the fact that God is invisible and immaterial. In some of these instances, men saw the *reflections* of God’s glory, but they did not see His

essence. Other instances reveal that spirit can be manifested in visible form. God is perfectly capable of revealing Himself through a physical manifestation. This happened when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as a dove as He was baptized in water (John 1:32-34). When John the Baptist saw this visible sign, he was persuaded that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. The invisible Spirit of God revealed Himself in the form of a dove so that John could know with certainty the identity of the One (Jesus) who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. In the example from Exodus 33, Moses also needed divine assurance as he faced his God-given task of leadership; therefore, God gave him a physical sign.

Perhaps you are thinking, “If God is immaterial, why does the Bible speak of God’s hands, feet, ears, mouth, nose, or face? Why are there scriptural passages which speak about God doing something that a human being would do?” For example, Psalm 98 refers to God’s “right hand and his holy arm” (v. 1); Psalm 99:5 speaks of worshipping “at his footstool”; Psalm 91 speaks of “his feathers” and “his wings” (v. 4).

Because it is difficult for us really to understand the essence of God, He has inspired the writers of Scripture to use objects that are familiar to us and apply some characteristic of them to God. In this way we gain some understanding of the *unknown* by what is *known*. When this is done, we call it *figurative* language. In such cases, the idea is not taken *literally*, or as *fact*, but as a symbol to represent a certain concept. This can be illustrated in the following exercises.

- 4** Read Psalm 34:15 and circle the letter preceding the correct explanation of this Scripture.
 - a** The expression of God as having eyes, ears, and a face indicates that He literally sees, hears, and has visible form when He deals with people.
 - b** God knows and cares about the needs of the righteous, and He knows and cares about the sinfulness of those who do evil. This is expressed in a figurative way.

5 (Choose the one best answer.) When we read in Scripture that God is spirit, we understand that

- a) He has no physical body.
- b) God has no physical body form, but He is perfectly capable of revealing Himself through a physical form.
- c) references in Scripture which show God doing something a human would do use figurative language.
- d) all of the above, a), b), and c) are correct.
- e) only a) and c) above are correct.

God is One

Objective 3. *Match words used to describe the unity or oneness of God with definitions of each.*

When we say that God is *one*, we make reference to three concepts: 1) the numerical *unity* of God; 2) the *uniqueness* of God; and 3) the *simplicity* of God.

The Numerical Unity of God

First, when we speak of the unity of God, we refer to the fact that He is numerically one Being. Since there is but one Divine Being, all other beings exist through Him, of Him, and unto Him. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:6, “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” The second part of this verse may seem to contradict the concept that God is numerically one. This will be explained later in our discussion of the *Trinity*.

Solomon refers to the numerical unity of God in 1 kings 8:60 when he requests “that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other.” Surrounded on all sides by nations who offered a great variety of gods from which to choose, the people of Israel sometimes found it difficult to keep the idea that the Divine Being was one. Often the prophets, at great personal risk cried out to the people to remind them that Jehovah was one God (Deuteronomy 4:35,39).

Is the belief that there are many gods a part of your society? Do you know of some teachings concerning these

supposed gods and their relationships to people? I’ve noted that in some countries people worship many gods, or what they consider to be gods. Sometimes gods *seem* to exist in their culture for each ethnic group and for each compartment of their lives, so that there is a plurality of gods. But the Bible teaches the *uniqueness* of God; there can only be *one God*.

The Uniqueness of God

Other verses in the Bible, such as Deuteronomy 6:4, refer to the uniqueness of God: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” The Hebrew word here translated *one* can also be translated *an only*, which appears to be a better translation. Thus, Jehovah alone is the only God that is entitled to be called Jehovah. This is the message of Zechariah 14:9: “On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.” This same idea is expressed quite clearly in Exodus 15:11: “Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” The answer, of course, is that there is none. He is the one and only God.

These verses certainly reject the possibility that God is one among many gods. He is the sovereign ruler of the universe, and beside Him there is no other god. Throughout the Old Testament record, God reminded His people that He was *the only God*.

6 Read the following Scriptures and state what God says about Himself.

- a** Genesis 17:1: “I am ”
- b** Exodus 20:2-3: “I am
You shall have ”
- c** Exodus 20:23: “Do not make ”
- d** Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21. The message of each of these passages is that
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When I ask my students to make up an original definition of God, they often will begin by saying something like this: “God is a spirit that is eternal who created heaven and earth.” No matter what noun they use to define God, they almost always place the indefinite article in front of it. They say, “God is *a* spirit.” This gives the idea that there could be other spirits of equal rank. See how different the definition becomes when the definite article *the* is used in place of the indefinite article *a*: “God is *the* spirit that is eternal who created heaven and earth.” It has to be this way, since no other person or power fits into that category. God is *the only* God.

The Simplicity of God

In addition to numerical unity and uniqueness, the unity of God refers to the *inner* unity of the Divine Being. Often this aspect of unity is referred to as *simplicity*. By *simplicity* we mean the state of being free from division into parts. God is *spirit*, and as such He cannot be divided. Man’s being, by contrast, is compound: man is both material (body) and immaterial (spirit).

Everything about God is perfect. In other words, all of the characteristics of God are His *perfections*. The concept of inner unity or simplicity follows from some of God’s other perfections. For example, God’s existence is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself. He is *self-existent*, which means that eternal existence is part of His very nature. Thus, His self-existence excludes the idea that something preceded Him, as is the case with compound beings like man. The *simplicity* of God implies a number of things. One is that the three Persons of the Godhead are not just a number of parts which all together make up the Divine Essence. It also rules out the possibility of dividing God’s perfections from His essence or adding His characteristics to His essence. God’s essence and His perfections are one and the same thing. Thus, Scripture speaks of God as both light and life, righteousness and love, and in this way identifies Him with His perfections. In other words, we don’t say God *has* righteousness, but we say that He *is* righteousness. He *is* perfection!

7 Match the concepts used to describe the unity of God with the definitions of each concept.

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|--------|--|--------------------|
| a | He is the only God, and beside Him there is no other god. | 1) Numerical unity |
| b | There is but one God, and all other beings exist through Him. | 2) Uniqueness |
| c | This rejects the possibility of a plurality of gods. | 3) Simplicity |
| d | God's existence does not depend on anything outside of Himself. | |
| e | This is another way of describing God's <i>inner</i> unity. | |
| f | Man is compound—that is, he is both body and spirit; in contrast, God is spirit. | |
| g | God is the eternal spirit. | |

God is Triune

Objective 4. *Select statements which give the biblical teaching on the Trinity.*

We have seen that God is spirit, that He is personal, and that He is one. Now we consider a fourth aspect of His nature: that of trinity. *God is triune*. This may seem confusing to you. How can God be *one* and also be *triune*? The words *triune* and *trinity* contain the concepts of oneness or *three* (tri) and oneness or being *three-in-one*. As we approach this important subject, we recognize that this truth can be known only by revelation. Thus, we turn to what God has revealed in Scripture as the basis for our study of the following questions concerning the Trinity.

1. *What is the Trinity?* As we have seen, there is only one essence in the Divine Being. However, this one Divine Being is tri-personal or a Trinity. In Him there are *three* persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scholars who attempt to describe accurately these distinctions in the Godhead use different terms.

The variety of terms they use suggests that these scholars recognize how difficult it is to describe the Trinity. We have already defined the word person. A person is one who knows, feels, and decides.

Human experience teaches us that where there is a person, there is a distinct essence. Thus, every person is a distinct and separate individual who in himself expresses human nature. However, in the Triune God there are not three separate individuals who exist alongside of and separate from one another. Rather, there are only what we might refer to as *self-distinctions* within the Divine Essence. This term will be explained in the next paragraph.

2. *Who are the Persons?* As we have noted, there are three persons or subsistences in the Divine Essence: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of these persons is known by different *properties* (qualities or traits belonging to and especially peculiar to an individual). In Scripture these properties are made known by such titles, pronouns, qualities, and activities as are appropriate for reasoning, intelligent, and distinct persons. These personal properties are distinctive for each Person (they are *self-distinctions*) and they express the relationship of each to the others. Also, each in Himself expresses the Divine essence.

Thus, there are three persons in the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are of the same substance; they are equal in glory, power, majesty, and eternity; and they are one.

8 Read the following Scriptures and supply the correct answer to complete each sentence.

- a** In John 6:27 Jesus refers to God as
- b** In Hebrews 1:8 God the Father refers to the Son as
- c** Acts 5:3-4 declares that sin against the Holy Spirit is the same as sin against
- d** From these Scriptures we can make the conclusion that the Godhead has in it

3. *What is the evidence for the Trinity?* While the word *Trinity* is not found anywhere in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. Let's look at some of the evidences we find in Scripture.

The *Old Testament* was written in the Hebrew language. In Hebrew, one of the names of God, *Elohim*, is in the plural form—for example, in Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” This verse points to personal distinctions in God, to a plurality of persons in the Godhead. We find much clearer indications of personal distinctions in the Old Testament Scriptures which refer to the Angel of Jehovah. In some instances the Angel of the Lord could refer to a created being who was sent as a messenger of the Lord; in other instances He is believed to be the Son of God (see Genesis 16:7-13; 18:1-21; 19:1-28). As such, this *Angel* is identified with Jehovah, and on the other hand He is seen as separate or different from Jehovah.

Sometimes in the Old Testament more than one Person is mentioned (see Psalm 45:6-7; compare with Hebrews 1:8-9). At other times, God, who is clearly the speaker, mentions both the Messiah (Son) and the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 48:16; 61:1; 63:8-10).

The *New Testament* offers a clear revelation of God sending the Son into the world (John 3:16; Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:9). It also reveals both the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). In the New Testament we observe that the Father speaks to the Son (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22); the Son communes with the Father (Matthew 11:25-26; John 11:41; 12:27-28); and the Holy Spirit prays to God in the hearts of believers (Romans 8:26-27). In the New Testament, therefore, the separate persons of the Trinity are set forth distinctly before us.

In some Scriptures, all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned. At the baptism of the Son (Matthew 3:16-17), the Father speaks from heaven and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), Jesus names three Persons: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit” The three Persons are named alongside of each other in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 2 Corinthians 13:14, and 1 Peter 1:2. From these examples in the Scriptures, we can draw an abundance of evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity.

9 Match the completion (right) with the correct Scripture reference (left).

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|---|---------------------------|
| a Genesis 1:26 points to a | 1) Holy Spirit |
| b Isaiah 63:8-10 shows Jehovah in relation to the | 2) Redeemer or Savior |
| c John 3:16 reveals that God sent the Son to be our | 3) Savior and Holy Spirit |
| d John 14:26 and 15:26 indicate that both the Father and the Son sent to believers the indwelling | 4) Persons of the Trinity |
| e Matthew 3:16-17 and 28:19 reveal and name the | 5) Plurality of Persons |

4. *What are the difficulties in the doctrine?* Why is the teaching on the Trinity so difficult for us to understand? In our human experience we have nothing to compare to *trinity in unity* and *unity in trinity*. We know that no three human persons are structurally one person. No three human persons have complete knowledge of what each of the others is doing and thinking. Each person surrounds himself with a barrier of privacy. No human person has the distinct threesomeness such as is stated of God. People simply cannot comprehend the teaching concerning the Trinity based on their knowledge and human experience.

5. *How do we resolve the difficulties?* The basic problem in the attempt to explain the Trinity lies in the relation of the persons in the Godhead to the Divine Essence and to one another. This problem is one which the church can't remove. It can only try to reduce the problem by a proper definition of terms. Although the church has not tried to explain the *mystery* of the Trinity, it *has* tried to formulate a biblical doctrine of it, mainly to discourage errors which have threatened the church's

very life. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, we can see the doctrine of the Trinity to the degree that God has revealed it in His Word, even if we cannot understand it fully.

In our finite (limited) existence, we can never fully comprehend the infinite (that which is without limit). Paul describes this limitation of man in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Now we see but a poor reflection; then when we stand transformed in Christ's presence we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

10 From the following statements, select those that are TRUE in reference to the Trinity and our understanding of it.

- a** The Bible reveals that in the Divine Essence there are three persons.
- b** Each of the three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—has distinct properties, which are described by such titles, pronouns, qualities, and activities as apply to distinct persons.
- c** The Old Testament does not refer to a plurality of persons in the Godhead—it speaks only of Jehovah God.
- d** The New Testament reveals the persons of the Trinity more fully than the Old Testament.
- e** The New Testament gives us sufficient, scriptural basis for a doctrine of the Trinity.
- f** The main problem with our understanding of the tri-personality of God is that we have nothing in our experience to compare with the distinct threesomeness of the Divine Being.
- g** We can best resolve the problem of the Trinity by realizing that since it can't be fully explained, we should not try to make a doctrine concerning it.

Careful study of the Word reveals much about the tri-personality of God. Prayerful study of this doctrine enables us better to understand God's self-revelation, even if it is only partial. It also helps us to appreciate more fully the nature of God and the means He has provided for us to approach Him in love, worship, and dedicated service.

God is Eternal

Objective 5. Choose TRUE statements which express the implications for the Christian of the eternity of God.

Many people are interested in finding out where their ancestors came from. What would you say if I told you that I have no ancestors? You would not accept that as true, and you would be right. I do have ancestors, just as everyone does.

I say everyone does, but I cannot include God in that statement. He has no ancestors. So how did He come into being? That question has a very simple answer. He didn't! He has always existed, from eternity. That is why we can say *God is eternal*.

1. *What is eternity?* It is difficult for us to imagine the unknown future, but we might think back as far as our minds can go and try to imagine eternity. We refer to Genesis as the book of beginnings. In it we study about the beginning of creation, the beginning of man, and the beginning of nations. However, these distant beginnings were not *the beginning*.

We may go back even further to the time when the angels were created—those unique, celestial (heavenly) sons of God, who shouted for joy on that occasion when earth's foundations were laid—before the dawn of history (Job 38:4-7). Neither was that the beginning. In our minds we might see eternity as that infinite (unlimited) timelessness when all creation was present only in God's thoughts. Here our finite (limited) minds find it impossible to grasp the idea of infinity, or unlimited timelessness. The fact is that eternity is God's infinity in relation to time.

2. *Who inhabits eternity?* Men and angels are created beings, but God alone is without beginning. Thus, He is the only inhabitant of eternity. Man has a past, a present, and a future, but God dwells only in the present. Both the past and the future are the same as *now* to Him.

God is eternal in two ways: 1) He never began to be; He always was (Psalm 90:2). 2) His existence will never end (Deuteronomy 32:40; Psalm 102:27). Being eternal, God is free from all progression of time.

3. *How do we understand the concept of God's eternity?* Apart from the Scriptures, we can conclude that God always was because of the logic of the idea. Anybody knows that things do not just spring from nothing. A vacuum does not produce a thing. Therefore, if in the beginning of the universe nothing existed, and if there was just a vacuum, then it would have remained that way. But since we observe a vast universe all around us, we are forced by logic to accept the conclusion that something in the past never had a beginning—it always was. That *something* is God!

The eternity of God is revealed throughout Scripture. God is called the eternal God (Genesis 21:33); the Psalmist says, “From everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:2); and “You are the same and your years will never end” (Psalm 102:27). Isaiah’s inspired words declare that God is the one “who lives forever” (Isaiah 57:15), while Paul asserts to Timothy that God alone is the source of immortality (1 Timothy 6:16).

11 Circle the letters preceding statements that are TRUE.

- a** God’s eternity gives us confidence to know that the One in whom we trust will not disappear.
- b** God’s eternity encourages us when we have difficulties. We realize that God’s purposes, which have always stood, will stand forever. These purposes include those which concern our own lives.
- c** Knowledge of God’s infinity in relation to time makes us realize that our own decisions are not important because they are related only to time.

God is Immutable (Unchanging)

Objective 6. *State what the immutability of God means to you in your practical, Christian experience.*

We all have faults that need to be changed or corrected, but God does not. He is perfect. He doesn’t need anything to complement His character or attributes. He is perfect in every respect.

12 Read the following Scripture references and complete the sentences.

- a** In Psalm 102:25-27 our never-changing is contrasted with the ever-changing
- b** Isaiah 46:9-10, Psalm 33:11, and Psalm 119:160 reveal that God is unchanging in His and
- c** Malachi 3:6 indicates that because God is unchanging, He will have mercy on the descendants of Jacob so that they are not
- d** Psalm 103:17 speaks of God's unchanging and

The Scriptures which speak of God's *immutability*, or unchanging nature, teach us certain principles about the God we serve. Thiessen presents these principles (1979, p. 83), and we will list them to enable you to see them more clearly.

1. Since God is infinite, self-existent, and independent, He is above all the causes and possibilities of change.
2. God can neither increase nor decrease, and He is not subject to further development.
3. God's power can never become greater or less, and He can never be wiser or holier.
4. God cannot be more righteous, merciful, and loving than He has ever been or ever will be.
5. He cannot change in His relation to people. He operates according to eternal principles that do not vary with the change of the day.

Since God is unchangeable, we can commit ourselves completely to Him as we rely on His Word. We can face all of life's situations with confidence, knowing that in all things He works for our good (Romans 8:28).

You have probably noticed Scriptures such as Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29 which say that God does not change

His mind, and other Scriptures which say that He relented or was sorry that He had done a certain thing (1 Samuel 15:11; Jonah 3:9-10). This attitude of God does not refer to any fundamental change in His character or purpose. He always hates sin, and He always loves the sinner. This attitude is just as true before as after the sinner's repentance. However, God may change His dealings in view of people's change.

As an example of this, we see that God's attitude toward the sin of Israel did not change. He hated the nation's sin. Because His people insisted on continuing in sin, they quite naturally suffered the penalties of sin. However, when they repented and separated themselves from their sin, God's dealing with them changed as a result.

Someone has said that the sun shows no partiality or changeableness when it melts the wax and hardens clay, for the change is not in the sun but in the material upon which it shines. We can rely on the immutability or unchangeableness of God's purposes, His Word, and His nature. As the sun melts wax and hardens clay, God's unchangeableness works only for the good of those whose hearts are softened to respond favorably to Him, and for the destruction of those whose hearts do not respond favorably and become hardened.

13 To review the qualities of God's nature discussed in this section, match each quality (right) with its description (left).

- | | | |
|--------|---|-----------------|
| a | Being of one substance and essence | 1) Personality |
| b | Timelessness, without beginning or end | 2) Spirituality |
| c | Being unlimited by form or material substance | 3) Unity |
| d | Plurality of persons | 4) Trinity |
| e | Sameness as concerns purpose, word, and character | 5) Eternity |
| f | Being able to think, feel, and decide | 6) Immutability |

GOD'S NATURAL ATTRIBUTES

Objective 7. Match the four attributes of God with definitions of each.

We call those who specialize in the study about God *theologians*. You and I may not be considered to be theologians, but we have every right to study and analyze the doctrines, or teachings, about God so that we may understand Him better and love Him more. It is important to consider not only His nature but also His characteristics in this adventure of knowing Him better. Theologians call these characteristics *attributes*. Attributes simply refer to those qualities which are associated with or describe someone or something—in this case God. The attributes of God explain, why He acts as He does, and so we know what to expect from Him. His attributes include *omnipotence*, *omnipresence*, *omniscience*, and *wisdom*. First, we will consider the *omnipotence* of God.

The Omnipotence of God

Abraham's wife, Sarah, had traveled a lot in her life. She had seen Jehovah do great and marvelous things for her husband and herself. She could have won a beauty contest as a bride, but now this wrinkled, old lady was bent with care. She laughed when she heard the visitor tell her husband that she would soon be pregnant. Impossible! Do you blame Sarah for smiling? Yet, the heavenly visitor asked, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:1-15).

Of what divine characteristic was the Lord reminding Abraham and Sarah? His omnipotence—the fact that He is almighty or all-powerful. He can do anything! This absolute power of God is shown to us in Scripture in relation to:

1. Creation (Genesis 1:1)
2. Sustaining all things by His powerful word (Hebrews 1:3)
3. The redemption of people (Luke 1:35, 37)
4. Miracles (Luke 9:43)
5. The salvation of sinners (1 Corinthians 2:5; 2 Corinthians 4:7)
6. The completion of His purpose for His kingdom (1 Peter 1:5)

We have to remember, though, that God cannot do things that are absurd (ridiculous or unreasonable), such as make dry water. Nor does He do things that are inconsistent with His own nature.

A reality very consistent with God’s nature is the fact that He can limit the operation of His power if He so desires. For example, God gives to each person the freedom to choose between Him and Satan. God does not force any person to be saved against his own will. He limits Himself to allow each individual to make his own decision.

Jeremiah 32:17 declares to the Lord, “You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.” Later the Lord asked Jeremiah, “Is anything too hard for me?” (v. 27). When we understand the great power of our God, we should never again hesitate to ask His help in any circumstance that we face.

14 Read Exodus 3:11-12. What five words did God say to Moses to remind him of His omnipotence?.....
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The Omnipresence of God

A little boy wanted to do something bad, but he decided that he had better go under a roof to do it so that God, looking down from heaven, would not see him. What divine characteristic did the child not understand? The fact that God is omnipresent—He is everywhere present at all times. The Psalmist speaks of this in Psalm 139:7-10:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

The omnipresence of God does not mean that God has the same kind of relationship with everyone. He will reveal Himself,

bless, and encourage those who love and serve Him, but He will rebuke and punish those who oppose Him. He is in the storm, but not in the same way that He is with two of His children who sincerely pray for His guidance (Nahum 1:3; Matthew 18:20).

The knowledge that God is always present helps us to have courage in trials because we know that God is there to strengthen and guide us. It also serves to remind us to be very careful in how we live because God sees everything that we do, whether good or bad. We have a responsibility to serve God acceptably everywhere and at all times, for He is there.

We should also remind ourselves that we cannot use our own feelings as a measurement of God's presence with us. Regardless of how we feel, God is with us. Suppose a little girl was crying in the dark and her mother assured her that she was with her. The girl might think she had to see her mother to know she was there. Whether or not she could see her mother in no way would change the fact of her presence. And so it is with us. Whether we can *feel* God's presence or not, the Bible tells us He is everywhere. To know that is enough for us to maintain an attitude of praise and of courage at all times.

15 In your notebook, state two reasons why a recognition of the omnipresence of God should affect the way we live.

The Omniscience of God

It is just one step from the omnipresence of God to His omniscience—His knowledge of everything. Human beings often work hard to uncover facts. As we study to gain knowledge, we accumulate facts, but it seems that often the more we learn the more we realize how little we know.

God has no such problem. He knows everything. The Ruler of the universe has unlimited awareness. This fact is impossible for us to fully understand, yet it is essential to our faith in the perfection of God. Logically, He must know all that is actual and all that is possible. Otherwise, He would constantly learn things He did not know before, and He would need to adjust His plans and purposes accordingly.

Because God knows all things, He is able to tell ahead of time what is going to happen in the future. Therefore we find many events foretold in the Scriptures. This does not mean that the Eternal One makes the decisions about what is going to happen to us. He just knows what our decisions will be before we make them. Since He foresees, He can *foretell*, or tell what will take place in the future. His foretelling does not mean He *predetermined*, or decided in advance, what would take place.

The fact that God knows all things should strengthen our faith when we are in the middle of a very severe trial because He knows much more than we do about our problems. He knows the causes and what would happen with each of the solutions we might consider. We can draw great assurance from this fact as we seek His direction for the right solutions to our problems.

16 Read Psalm 139:1-19 and complete these statements.

- a** Verses speak of God's omniscience.
- b** Verses speak of His omnipotence.
- c** Verses speak of His omnipresence.

17 Which statements are TRUE in reference to God's omniscience?

- a** Since God knows what decisions I am going to make, all of my decisions are really His decisions.
- b** Knowing that God knows all things should lead me to turn to Him for guidance when I have a decision to make.
- c** To foretell means to predetermine.
- d** If God were not all-knowing, He would be less than perfect.
- e** Omniscience means to know everything there is to know, including perfect knowledge of the past, the present, and the future.

The Wisdom of God

Many scientists know an enormous amount of facts, but all the knowledge of this world has not solved society's problems. People just do not have the necessary wisdom to know how to apply their knowledge to problems in such a way that all can live together in peace and prosperity.

Wisdom is not the same as knowledge. It searches through the knowledge to find the highest purpose possible and then uses the best way to accomplish it. Since God is all-wise, He does all things well. In His perfect wisdom, He gave us His Word, the Bible, to guide us in all that we do. If we live according to His directions as recorded in His Word, we will benefit from His wisdom and be blessed by Him.

Sometimes we fail to see God's wisdom in permitting certain things to happen in our lives. First of all, we must remember that God allows us to make our own choices, and if those choices are not in accordance with His will, we can bring problems upon ourselves. Also, we must remember that we live in a sinful world, and Christians as well as non-Christians are sometimes the victims of natural disasters or evil actions of others in this sin-damaged world. God is not obligated to come to us and explain exactly why everything has happened the way it has. He may allow things to happen for reasons that we know nothing about. But as 1 John 4:8 says, "perfect love drives out fear." We can trust God fully in all kinds of circumstances, knowing that in His infinite wisdom He will work out all things for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

Scriptures such as Psalm 104:24-30 and Jeremiah 10:12 remind us that we can see God's wisdom through His creation. It took some very clever designing to accomplish the intricate designs of nature. I am left speechless when I examine the feather of a bird. Every tiny part is designed for a special function either in flight or for the protection of the bird from the elements. If I examine a bird's skeleton, I find that the larger bones are hollow and filled with air which holds the little creature in the air. The offspring of the bird will have the same design. This is but a small example of the great wisdom of our God.

I am blessed when I remember that God also makes His wisdom available to us as we need it. It matters not what we face today, tomorrow, next week, or next month. James 1:5 tells us not to doubt, but to ask for wisdom because God is generous and gracious in giving it to His people.

18 Based on our discussion of God’s wisdom, which of these do you consider are good examples of His wisdom?

- a** If I have unexpected expenses and don’t know how to plan so that I can take care of them, I can ask God for direction and know that He can give me the wisdom I need to work out the problem.
- b** A Christian girl who is a good example and testimony of the love of Christ dies unexpectedly in an accident. Because her death brings many in the community to the Lord, we know that in His wisdom He planned it for a higher good.
- c** God’s Word, the Bible, is a guide to show me how to live a good and fruitful life.
- d** God gives church leaders wisdom to conduct spiritual matters of the church in accordance with His will.
- e** The organization of the human body reveals the wisdom of God.
- f** God’s wisdom won’t permit Christians to make errors in judgment.

19 To review this section, match the four attributes of God with the definition of each.

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| a God’s quality of being everywhere present | 1) Omnipotence |
| | 2) Omniscience |
| b The way God works to bring about the highest purpose in the best way possible for His creatures and all creation | 3) Omnipresence |
| | 4) Wisdom |
| c God’s quality of knowing all things | |
| d God’s quality of being all powerful | |

In this lesson we have reviewed God’s nature and His natural attributes. In our next lesson we will look at the moral characteristics of God and His mighty works. This will prepare us for a study of God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As you gain greater understanding of our Divine Creator and your relationship to Him, you will be better able to serve Him and witness to others about His great love.

self-test

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one best answer for each statement.

1 Christians worship as they do instead of worshiping places, forms, or other limitations because God is

- a) spirit.
- b) a unity.
- c) omnipotent.
- d) eternal.

2 If I truly realize that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present, I will

- a) conduct my life in a way that is pleasing to Him and trust Him to help me in every trial I face.
- b) also realize that no matter what choices I make, they are what He has chosen for me, and there is nothing I can do to change my life in any way.
- c) work out my daily problems and needs in my own way because God should be called upon only for the greater problems of life.

3 Because of the nature of God and His attributes, He not only has the ability to know what our needs are, but He also

- a) is too far away to get involved in solving them.
- b) realizes that because we do not have the same nature and attributes, He cannot truly communicate with us in a meaningful way.
- c) is able to provide for every need that we have.

4 When we are convinced that God works in all things for our good and His glory, we are recognizing His

- a) personality.
- b) infinity.
- c) wisdom.
- d) omniscience.

TRUE-FALSE. Place a **T** in front of the statements that are true and **F** in front of the statements that are false.

- **5** The quality of God which demonstrates that we can approach Him and that He is concerned about our human needs is unity.
 - **6** Christianity differs from the worship of many gods because God is spiritual.
 - **7** The Bible teaches that there are three persons in the Divine Essence: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We call this quality the Trinity of God.
 - **8** The qualities of God which describe His existence without beginning or end and His unchanging quality are His eternity and immutability.
 - **9** A person who may not be able to see the purpose in his trials may not be fully aware of the wisdom of God.
- 10** The largest amount of doctrinal evidence for the Trinity is found in the Old Testament.

answers to study questions

- 11 a** True.
b True.
c False.

1 Your answer.

- 12 a** God; world.
b purpose; Word.
c destroyed.
d love; righteousness.

2 Your answer. I've noted that we get to know others by talking to them, listening to them, and studying them. To know God, we must take time to do these things.

- 13 a** 3) Unity.
b 5) Eternity.
c 2) Spirituality.
d 4) Trinity.
e 6) Immutability.
f 1) Personality.

3 b) ability to think, feel, and make decisions.

14 "I will be with you."

4 b) God knows and cares This is expressed in a figurative way.

15 We know God is always there to strengthen and encourage us in our trials. We know that He sees everything we do, whether good or bad, and we have a responsibility to serve Him at all times.

5 d) all of the above, a), b), and c) are correct.

- 16 a** Verses 1-6
b Verses 13-19
c Verses 7-12

- 6 a** God Almighty.
b the Lord your God; no gods before me.
c any gods to be alongside me.
d the Lord our God is the only God, and apart from Him there is no God.

7 Of course, all of these concepts are related, as they describe the oneness or unity of God. We have matched them in this way:

- a** 2) Uniqueness.
b 1) Numerical unity.
c 2) Uniqueness.
d 3) Simplicity.
e 3) Simplicity.
f 3) Simplicity.
g 1) or 2) Numerical unity or uniqueness.

- 17 a** False.
b True.
c False.
d True.
e True.

- 8 a** God the Father.
b God.
c God.
d three distinct persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).

18 Answers **a**, **c**, **d**, and **e** are good examples of God's wisdom. Answer **b** is not a good example because the girl's accident was the result of human error and not the direction of God. However, God did work for good in the situation by using it to bring people to Himself, and in this His wisdom is seen. Answer **f** is not a good example because God in His wisdom allows us to make our own choices. We can choose to ask Him to give us wisdom in making choices.

- 9 a** 5) Plurality of Persons.
b 3) Messiah and Holy Spirit.
c 2) Redeemer or Savior.
d 1) Holy Spirit.
e 4) Persons of the Trinity.
- 19 a** 3) Omnipresence.
b 4) Wisdom.
c 2) Omniscience.
d 1) Omnipotence.
- 10 a, b, d, e, and f** are true.