

The Love of God Discipleship Series

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PART ONE

God's Love for You

The purpose of the Love of God Discipleship Series is to equip the believer with sound Biblical truths and practical guidance for spiritual living. In this first work, God's Love for You, you will study basic Bible doctrines taught through the eyes of God's love for you. Part Two, entitled Your Response to God's Love, continues to teach sound doctrine and emphasizes God's love and grace as the motivation for your response to Him. Part Three, God's Love through You, will help you discover how to allow God's love, grace, and power to work through you as you reach out to others.

This series is a new look at discipleship. While it adheres quite clearly to the truths that believers hold dear, it departs from the customary rules and regulations that are so commonly added. If you trust that God is able to love someone so much that they would "want" to seek Him and believe that His grace and Spirit are capable of teaching and leading a sincere believer, you will appreciate this work.

How do Christians go from that initial joy of salvation to being completely miserable as a believer? My opinion is that well-meaning "mature" Christians, sometimes from day one, teach the new believers that following Jesus is *difficult*. They ignore that Jesus Himself said that His yoke is *easy*, and His burden is *light*.

My husband and I started out our Christian journey with all the joy and hope and faith a Christian could have, but very systematically, had our joy preached right out of us. We were taught that part of pleasing God is submitting to our leaders, and that the leaders are not to be questioned. Since what we wanted most of all was to please God, we obeyed. With all of our hearts we did everything we were told to do. We got as involved as possible in ministries, too; even got licensed, then ordained and served as pastors. Everything seemed wonderful at first, but little by little it all got turned upside down. Instead of doing what we did because we were so full of love for Jesus, we began thinking that those things we were doing were making us more holy, acceptable, and closer to God. In other words, we based our relationship with God on what we did and didn't do. We didn't know that we were severing ourselves from the work of the cross of Christ.

After we realized that we had taken a wrong turn, it took many years to get free from all the religious knots that we and others had tied over our lives, but one by one, they were removed as God kept leading us back to His word. As we tried to find a church that believed in the love and grace of God, we became increasingly aware, that what we had experienced was not at all unique, that the body of Christ, nearly as a whole, does not understand grace beyond initial salvation. Out of this extreme frustration and the realization that so many Christians have fallen from grace and don't even know it, came this work you hold in your hands.

The sad fact that many Christians today do not understand their continued salvation is a strong indication that they do not have a firm understanding of New Testament doctrine. They go to church on Sunday, read a few scriptures during the week, read a Christian book now and then, but never really take the time to study sound Bible teachings. Josh McDowell in his book,

The Last Christian Generation, points out this problem and predicts that in one generation, Christians will know nearly nothing about the Bible. So, along with the desire to declare boldly the grace of God, there is that of giving a firm foundation for what Christians believe. Every effort has been made to state theology in digestible form and always from God's perspective of love for the people He has created. I hope that after reading this book, you will understand what you believe and why you believe it along with understanding in a deeper way God's love and grace for you.

The Existence of God

We Believe . . .

. . . that there is one God who has always existed and Who will always exist Who created the heavens and the earth.

When endeavoring to understand a topic, it is easiest to begin at the beginning. When we study God, this task is not so simple. We deal with a world in which things have a clear beginning and a clear end. That is often referred to as a *finite* world. We can examine and prove what is finite, and we are comfortable believing in what we can perceive through our five senses. As they say, "Seeing is believing."

However, when we begin to contemplate the existence of God, our finite way of thinking is turned upside down because God is not finite. He has no beginning and He has no end. It is enough to stretch the mind beyond its capability to try to understand that God has always existed and always will. Just think about that for one minute and you will sense your mind being severely challenged to take it in.

So, how do we human beings even know there is a God? How could we, who live in such an "advanced" culture, possibly believe He is there when we are taught that we human beings are just the end-product of a long process of evolution? To believe in God's existence is almost presented as a form of weakness or ignorance. Certainly, no well-educated person would believe such legends, we are told. Of course, if someone does believe in God, it is thought that he/she needs a crutch to help him/her through life. It is thought a well-educated and mentally sound person does not need to believe in a divine being.

Creation Speaks

However, God knows our limitations, and He knows it is difficult for us to think beyond what we can see, hear, feel, taste, and touch; so, He has gone to elaborate means to let us know He exists.

In Psalm 19:1-4 we read:

- ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.*
- ² Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.*
- ³ There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.*
- ⁴ Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.*

God is constantly speaking to the world of His existence through the beauty He has created. The planets and the stars shout, "God is here!" Each day and each night and in every language, God is saying, "I exist!" There is no place anywhere in the world where anyone can deny the existence of God because every minute of every day and every night, creation is shouting that He is here.

Science often seeks to minimize the things God has created by trying to explain their origins, but even in the most detailed study of evolution, no one, but no one, can account for the moment life began. They theorize. They extrapolate. They guess, basically. Still, no one can explain it apart from a higher being lighting the original flame of life. This is because only God can create life. So, when we look at living trees, living animals, and living human beings, deep inside of every person on the entire face of the earth, no matter what the language, there is a realization that there is a God who caused it all to be. In Romans 1:18-20 we read,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Notice in verse 20 that "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." God's creation has been speaking of His existence from the beginning. Whether you think that beginning was six thousand years ago, or millions of years ago, for however long, it has been shouting, "There is a God who made all the beauty and life that surround you."

Take a minute or two to think about this. Forget about nature and the galaxies for a minute which by themselves should be enough to speak to us. Take a look at yourself. Look at your hand. If you are healthy, you can bend each of your ten fingers with barely a thought. You can grasp, slap, clap, make a fist, touch, conduct a symphony, write, draw, paint, even communicate...with just your hands. Your very skin on your hands is a living organism put there to protect you from pathogens that would otherwise destroy you. How could skin just happen? Under your skin are muscles and bones, blood and tendons, and nerves! Each of these systems is composed of minute cells, each differently structured depending on its purpose. Each of these is perfectly placed in the shape of a hand. Think about that also—just the shape of your hand itself! If you look at your hands long enough, you will be amazed about every little detail. Your hand is connected to your wrist, your arm to your elbow; and so the song continues. Get out an anatomy book and take an unbiased look at the pictures. Then read further how each system functions, not only that it functions, but that each system is related to the other, that they work in perfect harmony. If one little thing goes wrong, the body begins to do its job to make things right again. All of this begs the question, "Can you seriously believe that the human body evolved on its own?" Evolution? It does not make one ounce of sense. All of this wisdom, order, and beauty are the product of an infinitely intelligent Designer.

A common illustration, which I will modernize, is to open up the back of a computer. This is frightening for most people, but amazingly, many people can look inside and know what each part is and what each part does. No one would seriously tell you, "Really, it just happened that way. I put some silicon, some heavy metals, some wire and information in a bag and shook it and out came this device." You would tell him he is a maniac and needs to seek professional help. You have enough sense and knowledge to look at the inside of a computer and realize that it has a designer, someone with superior intelligence who planned and put together an intricate device without which most of us would not want to live in today's world. So it is with our human bodies. Take a look inside, not just the things you can see with your naked eye, but also the things too

small for that! There is no reasonable and unbiased person who can see the perfection of the human body and believe that it “just happened”. It is too amazing to not have been designed by a being superior to itself. It takes more faith to believe it “just happened” than it does to believe it was designed and created.

Even if it were possible to shake and bake a computer, we would still have to explain the origin of the elements in the bag. From where did the wire, silicon, and information come? So it is with evolution, we can believe that species change over time based on their environment and adapt. Not only is this believable, but it is also observable to a certain extent. However, evolution cannot and will never be able to explain the *origins* of life. Life—no one can create *life* but God. Even if you believe there was a big bang to start the whole ball rolling...what made things explode and what exploded and where did all of *that* matter originate? The only explanation, no matter what your beliefs about how it all actually got started, is that there is a God.

Our Conscience Speaks

It is not true that we are born a blank slate. Even science knows this. Each person is born a unique individual. Of course, our experiences will help shape what we believe and how we perceive things, but each is different. However, in one way, we are all the same. God has given each person a conscience.

If someone tells a lie, a normal person will have a sense that this is wrong. In order to find peace with telling a lie, someone will have to justify in their mind the telling of it. We know it isn't correct to lie, but we tell ourselves that if the lie brings about the desired outcome, then it is ok. If we steal, we know that is wrong also, and in order to not feel guilty about stealing, we have to produce a reason it was justified, such as stealing to feed one's family, or stealing because it isn't fair someone has something we don't.

This is often explained to us as societal guilt. It is implied that if society didn't tell us certain behaviors were unacceptable, then we wouldn't think that they were. However, reverse the tables, and we all understand that certain things are wrong. If someone lies to *you* or steals from *you*, you are *sure* it is wrong, and society doesn't need to teach you that!

The argument here isn't that certain things are right and wrong. The point is that each of us has a conscience. That conscience knows what is right and wrong. Over time, we can excuse ourselves and ignore our conscience to the point that our conscience doesn't bother us anymore. We see this sadly all over the world. People steal from, kill, and purposely destroy each other without giving it a thought and apparently without much guilt.

There is a good example of conscience in John 8. Perhaps you know the story of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of the Jews stated that if people committed adultery, they were to be stoned. So, the woman was brought out to the people for justice. They brought this woman to Jesus, and Jesus said, “Let he who is without sin, be the first to cast a stone at her.” That story is amazing enough, but there is something about the human conscience in what is said. In John 8:9 it is written, “Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last.” These men were ready to stone this woman to death and according to their law, had every right to do so. There were not even Christians, but they knew deep in their conscience, that none of them was without sin. So, even though they had the right according to their law to kill this woman, the higher revelation that they also were sinners, caused them to walk away.

Faith

In Hebrews 11:6 Paul writes, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” In order to come to God, we have to believe He exists. Yet how do we believe He exists if we cannot

see Him? By faith. God has put in each man the ability to believe in Him. This is called faith. It is, in one way, a sixth sense, the ability to perceive beyond what our senses tell us.

We are born with faith. By faith we accomplish dozens of tasks each day. A baby takes his first step. We turn on water. We turn off and turn on lights. We sit in a chair without looking back. We put a car in gear and drive. We move forward when the light turns green. We eat. We drink. We use credit cards. We turn on all sorts of electrical devices. We believe what someone tells us when we ask them a question. We also usually believe what we read in a newspaper or hear on a news report. All of these things require faith.

Faith is both natural as in the examples above and supernatural as a response to hearing good news about God. Paul wrote in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. When we hear the good news of Jesus Christ, faith supernaturally comes to our hearts to believe in God and what is true about Him. By faith, someone who once explained the existence of world through the eyes of evolution, is now able to “see” the truth about creation.

In Hebrews 1:3 we read, “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” By supernatural faith, we understand certain things, and one of them is that God formed the world by his words. He made things exist that never existed simply by speaking. It takes faith to believe this because it just does not exist in this world apart from God. We human beings can try speaking to a rock to become a toad, but it is not going to happen.

Each human being has faith. When we hear the truth about God, supernatural faith comes to us and we are able to believe truths we once sought to deny. Here is where our will enters. God does not force us to receive Him. Even when our eyes have been opened to believe, we still have the ability to reject Him. Yet, who would be so foolish? When God reveals Himself to us, let us respond with the faith He has given and embrace Him with open arms.

God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. He said, “Let there be birds in the air,” and there were. You cannot believe this with finite thinking. Creation is speaking. Our consciences are speaking. Both are telling us the good news of God’s existence and power as the Creator of all that is good. Let us respond in faith.

One God

Not only do we believe God has always existed, but that there is only ONE God. There are few things that will infuriate our world more today than saying this. In fact, many non-Christians do believe in the existence of a god, and they will defend your right to both believe it and say so publicly. However, let the words come from your lips, “There is only ONE God,” and anger raises its ugly head. You will be accused of being a fanatic, an extremist, even self-righteous.

Why is this? We as human beings don’t like to impose our views on others, and we especially don’t appreciate someone else imposing their views on us. This is especially true in countries where freedoms are valued. When you say there is only one God, the perception can be that you exclude the beliefs of others and imply that their views are invalid. In countries where there is one religion only, if you say that your God is the only true God, you will be hated and persecuted.

We will talk in the next chapter about why we believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God, but assuming it is, the word has many things to say about there being just one God. Here are several verses that speak to the existence of only one God.

Isaiah 44:5 “I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.”

1 Timothy 2:5 “For there is one God.”

John 1:3 “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

Ephesians 4:4-6 *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

Isaiah 45:14 *“Surely God is in you, and there is no other; There is no other God.”*

Isaiah 45:21 *“And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me.”*

1 Corinthians 8:4 *“Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.”*

LIFE APPLICATIONS

Looking again at Hebrews 11:6, we see that not only do we need to believe that God is (that He exists) but that “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”. Believing that God exists is just the beginning. We see in this verse that God wants us to believe in more than His existence. He wants to believe that He rewards those who seek Him. In other words, when we reach out to Him, He answers our prayers. God, who created the universes by His word, wants you to know Him personally. That is why He sent His only Son because of His love for us, His desire to give us freely eternal life. The God who “made the stars also” *loves* you.

Believing that there is one God who has always existed, will not necessarily gain you popularity among friends and family, but it will bring peace to your life. When we realize that the one true God who has always existed and who will always exist loves us, we will realize that there is more to this life than just you and I and what we can know and do on our own.

So, what is God like? We will study that in detail in Lesson 5, but let us examine a few of His qualities. First of all, God is all-knowing (omniscient). He can see what is going on everywhere in the entire universe at the same time. He knows the thoughts of every person. When we join our lives to His through Jesus Christ, our lives are led by the One who knows everything. We don't have to try and know everything ourselves. We can do our research, of course, but then pray for guidance, and know that we are connected to the God who knows all. His guidance will be far superior to our human reasoning.

God is also everywhere-present (omnipresent). This means there is no place that He is not. No matter where we go, He will be there with us. This gives us confidence to live each day knowing we will never be alone. It also inspires us to live in such a way that brings joy to His heart.

Another quality that expresses God's being is that He is all-powerful (omnipotent). There is nothing impossible for Him. We can ask Him to meet our needs, and He will have no trouble meeting them. He will remove obstacles in our life, give us strength to live victoriously, and protect us.

So, there is only one God who has always existed and who will always exist. He is all-knowing, everywhere present, and all-powerful. This same God also loves you and wants you to know Him personally through His Son.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. Why is it difficult for human beings to believe that there is one God who has always existed?
2. How does God speak to us through creation?
3. According to this lesson, how does God speak to us through our conscience?
4. What role does faith play in our ability to believe in the existence of God?

5. Why is it acceptable to most people to say that God exists, but it is not acceptable if one says that there is only ONE God?

6. What do these three qualities of God mean, and in what ways are they important in our everyday lives?

- Omniscient

- Omnipresent

- Omnipotent

7. Why is simply **believing** that there is one God not enough? What else does God want us to know? (Hebrews 11:6)