# A Theology of God - Part 1

Selected Passages

In our day and age, it is rapidly becoming clear that the evangelical church does not truly stand for the foundations and pillars that have undergird it for some centuries through the past. Quite a few modern leaders, even of huge Evangelical Churches, are casting aside, taking radical and dramatic steps toward what, some decades ago, were the first steps toward theological liberalism. The result of this betrayal has ultimately been that the people sitting in the pew are being deceived and led along a path that ultimately takes them to spiritual ignorance and a serious lack of knowledge and understanding of God's Word and of His nature.

A recent survey of what we can call "Young Evangelicals" demonstrated some distress realities:

- 82% of this group believe that men have the ability to turn to God of their own initiative.
- 74% believe that individuals must do something or things that contribute in a functional way to their own salvation.
- 71% believe that Jesus Christ is the first and greatest being CREATED by God.
- 65% believe that God knows all that happens but that He has no deterministic part in what or why it happens.
- 57% believe that their Local Church has the authority to withhold communion and to excommunicate them (this refers to those who are evangelical and attend church at least once per year).
- 56% believe that the Holy Spirit is a "force" and NOT a personal Being.
- 54% believe that everyone sins a little, but that most people are good by nature.
- 48% believe that God accepts the acts of worship in every religion, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.
- 48% believe that even that smallest of sins deserves eternal damnation and that the issue is not a sinful nature or association with Adam.
- 42% believe that Worshipping alone or with one's family is a way to replace Church.
- 39% think that their good deeds help to earn them a place in heaven.
- and finally 37% believe that God ALWAYS rewards faith with material blessings.

Just as an aside, in this survey, the Evangelical was defined as those who strongly agree that:

- 1. The Bible is the Highest authority
- 2. Evangelism is very important
- 3. Sin can only be removed by Jesus' death on the cross.

4. Salvation comes ONLY by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior.

We ought also note that virtually all of the heresies above were dealt with in the 3 great Church counsels (1<sup>st</sup> Council of Nicaea; 1<sup>st</sup> Council of Constantinople; the Council of Orange; and quite a number of them are refuted by the Book Romans.

- Paul wrote that those who had come to Christ by faith were thereby mature and able to receive the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:6).
- Speaks of Spiritual Wisdom

<sup>6</sup> However, we speak wisdom **among those who are mature**, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, **who are coming to nothing**.

• He described believers as "mature" when he <u>referred to those</u> <u>whose righteousness was in Christ (Phil. 3:2–20)</u>, as opposed to those who had confidence in the flesh.

<sup>2</sup> Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!
 <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; <sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup> if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Pressing Toward the Goal

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.
<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

#### Our Citizenship in Heaven

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. <sup>18</sup> For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: <sup>19</sup> whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

• Paul **also declared** that the <u>apostles warned and taught</u> everyone "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). exercised.

<sup>28</sup> Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, <u>that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus</u>.

- The deeper, more "solid" truths about the priesthood of the Lord Jesus could only be given to those who knew Him as Savior.
  - Athletic training and competition form the metaphor implied by this particular word (cf. 1 Tim. 4:7, 8).

<sup>7</sup> But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. <sup>8</sup> For bodily exercise profits a little, but <u>godliness is</u> <u>profitable for all things</u>, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

• The one who has come to Christ for spiritual completion is then trained by the Word to discern truth from error and holy behavior from unholy (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
 <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

# A. The Peril of Not Progressing

- Heb. 6 tells us that it is **our natural state** to be those who "progress" in spirituality
  - Hebrews 6:1-8

**6** Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.

<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

<sup>7</sup> For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; <sup>8</sup> but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

- This (along with other passages), leads us to an inescapable conclusion:
- There are so many around who have confidence in self, essentially confidence in what the Bible calls "the flesh"
  - In such, they THINK they know far more than they actually, or are even ABLE to know!!!
  - And so they end up with all manner of opinion that is covered with and thought to be truth but in reality falsehood...
- And we must take care to be sure that we do not fall into the SAME trash pit!!
  - Thinking our opinions and impressions are sources for truth.
  - And so, we are left with what we've said in other places and fallen upon many, many times...
  - We MUST draw what we embrace as SURE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GOD from the Revelation of and from there ALONE!!!
- So, as those who are concerned with the Body of Christ living and knowing about the One Whom the serve, we are forced to ask the question:

#### What Do We Know, from the Word of God, about God?

## A. God Is a spirit.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

• This verse represents the classical statement on the nature of God as Spirit.

- The phrase means that God is invisible (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27)
- as opposed to the physical or material nature of man (1:18; 3:6).
- The word order of this phrase puts an emphasis on "Spirit," and the statement is essentially emphatic.
- Man could never comprehend the invisible God unless He revealed Himself, as He did in Scripture and the Incarnation.

### • must worship.

- Jesus is not speaking of a desirable element in worship but that which is absolutely necessary.
- in spirit and truth.
  - The word "spirit" does not refer to the Holy Spirit but to the human spirit.
  - Jesus' point here is that a person must worship
    - not simply by external conformity to religious rituals and places (outwardly)
    - but inwardly ("in spirit") with the proper heart attitude.
- The reference to "truth" refers to worship of God consistent with the revealed Scripture and centered on the "Word made flesh" who ultimately revealed His Father (14:6).
  - So it is not just energetically or not hypocritically but genuinely.

**2** Cor 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

#### • the Lord is the Spirit.

- Yahweh of the OT is the same Lord who is saving people in the New Covenant through the agency of the Holy Spirit.
- The same God is the minister of both the Old and New Covenants.
- there *is* liberty.
  - Freedom from sin and the futile attempt to keep the demands of the law as a means of earning righteousness (cf. John 8:32–36; Rom. 3:19, 20).
  - The believer is no longer in bondage to the law's condemnation and Satan's dominion.

## **B.** Is declared to be

1. He is Light.

Is 60:19 "The sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; But the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory.

• sun shall no longer ... everlasting light.

- Isaiah, looking beyond the millennial kingdom, sees a view of the new Jerusalem following the Millennium (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).
- His prophetic perspective did not allow him to distinguish the eternal phase of the future kingdom from the temporal one, just as the OT prophets could not distinguish between the first and second advent of Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10, 11).

James 1:16-17 Do not be deceived my beloved brethren. <sup>17</sup>Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

- Do not be deceived.
  - The Gr. expression refers to erring, going astray, or wandering. Christians are not to make the mistake of blaming God rather than themselves for their sin.
- **1:17 Every good ... perfect gift is from above.** Two different Gr. words for "gift" emphasize the perfection and inclusiveness of God's graciousness. The first denotes the act of giving, and the second is the object given. Everything related to divine giving is adequate, complete, and beneficial.
  - Father of lights. An ancient Jewish expression for God as the Creator, with "lights" referring to the sun, moon, and stars (cf. Gen. 1:14–19).
  - **no variation or shadow of turning.** From man's perspective, the celestial bodies have different phases of movement and rotation, change from day to night, and vary in intensity and shadow.
    - But God does not follow that pattern—He is changeless (cf. Mal. 3:6; 1 John 1:5).

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

**1** John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

- Fellowship with Him and one another
- we have heard from Him.
  - The message that John and the other apostles preached came from God not from men (cf. Gal. 1:12).
- God is light.
  - In Scripture, light and darkness are very familiar symbols.
    - Intellectually, "light" refers to biblical truth while "darkness" refers to error or falsehood (cf. Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23; John 1:4; 8:12).
    - Morally, "light" refers to holiness or purity while "darkness" refers to sin or wrongdoing (Rom. 13:11–14; 1 Thess. 5:4–7).

- The heretics claimed to be the truly enlightened, walking in the real light, but John denied that because they do not recognize their sin.
  - BTW, the same is much true today those who consider themselves enlightened see themselves as caretakers of the truth and those that have something the rest of us ought to see as right.
- About that basic reality, they were unenlightened.
- ...no darkness at all.
  - With this phrase, John forcefully affirms that God is absolutely perfect and nothing exists in God's character that impinges upon His truth and holiness (cf. James 1:17).

<sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

- Another thing that we see God declared to be is:
  - 2. God is Love.

1 John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

- John introduces us to the first of 5 reasons why Christians love those around them, including both believers and unbelievers: because God is the essence of love.
  - The gnostics believed that God was immaterial spirit and light, but never defined the source of love as coming from His inmost being.
  - As He is spirit (John 4:24), light (1:5), and a consuming fire (Heb. 12:9), so He is love.
  - Love is inherent in all He is and does.
  - Even His judgment and wrath is perfectly harmonized with His love.

**1 John 4:16** And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

- "Have known" could be translated as "have come to know" and its' grammar speaks of an ongoing process of growing in knowledge.
  - Note also that it speaks of this growing and ongoing gaining of the love that God has (and by implication) the ability to walk in and show forth that love to others.
  - At the end of the verse John speaks of the "abiding in God" and of God's "abiding us", obviously speaking of the enjoyment of fellowship with Him and of the results of that fellowship in our lives and actions.

3. He is Invisible.

Job 23:8–9 "Look, I go forward, but He is not there, And backward, but I cannot perceive Him; 9 When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.

- Job is talking about how, if possible, he would present his case to God...
  - Only he CAN"T find him to speak with Him!
  - This is not talking about prayer or meditation
  - It is talking about the kind of face to face conversation that Job was "enjoying" with his 3 friends...
  - But, Even though Job couldn't sense God's presence (in a normal, human fashion,
    - he believed He was present and affirmed his commitment to God's purpose in this test (v. 10)

<sup>10</sup> But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. (Job 23:10)

• and his continued obedience to God's Word, which were the most important issues in his life (vv. 11, 12).

<sup>11</sup> My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside.

- <sup>12</sup> I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food. (Job 23:11–12)
- John speaks of much the same idea in those famous verses:
- •

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

- In verse 17-18 John is corroborating the truth of v. 14, concerning the Word Made Flesh, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth".
  - these verses draw a closing contrast to the prologue.
  - The law, as was given by Moses, was not a display of God's grace but God's demand for holiness.
  - God designed the law as a means to demonstrate the unrighteousness of man in order to show the need for a Savior, Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:19, 20; Gal. 3:10–14, 21–26).
    - Romans 3:19–20

<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

• Galatians 3:10–14 - The Law Brings a Curse

<sup>10</sup> For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." <sup>11</sup> But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." <sup>12</sup> Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

<sup>13</sup> Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), <sup>14</sup> that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

• Galatians 3:21–26

<sup>21</sup> Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. <sup>22</sup> But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. <sup>23</sup> But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Sons and Heirs

<sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

- Furthermore, the law revealed only a part of truth and was preparatory in nature.
  - The reality or full truth toward which the law pointed came through the person of Jesus Christ.
- **1:18 who is in the bosom of the Father.** This term denotes the mutual intimacy, love and knowledge existing in the Godhead (13:23; Luke 16:22, 23). **declared.** Theologians derived the term "exegesis" or "to interpret" from this word. John meant that all that Jesus is and does interprets and explains who God is and what He does (14:8–10).
- Over in John 5:37 we see another place where this idea is put forth God is invisible...He was invisible and indiscernible except to those to whom He revealed Himself...

- Jesus, speaking of His equality with the Father, speaks of the at least 4 different ways that God had chosen to reveal Himself to the Jews, and that they had ignored...
  - He had spoken before through the Prophets
  - He spoke recently through John the Baptist
  - He has spoken at that present time through the Works of Christ (miracles, healing and powerful preaching)
  - And also through the witness of the Father Himself (making this point to underscore another one...)

John 5:37-38 - And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. <sup>38</sup> But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

- The Father Himself ... has testified. Cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22.
- There is actually a 5<sup>th</sup> way in which the Father had spoken, we see it in vv38-39:

<sup>38</sup> But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

Witness of the Scriptures

<sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

- In v39, some think that the verb "search" could also be understood as a command (i.e., "Search the Scriptures!")
  - But most prefer this translation as an indicative.
  - The verb implies diligent scrutiny in investigating the Scriptures to find "eternal life."
  - However, Jesus points out that with all their fastidious effort, they miserably failed in their understanding of the true way to eternal life through the Son of God (*see Matt. 19:16–25*; cf. 14:6; 2 Tim. 3:15).
- They testify of Me. Cf. v. 45. Christ is the main theme of Scripture. See note on 1:45.
- This idea (truth) of the "invisibility of God is present throughout the Bible:

John 5:37 And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

**Col 1:15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

• The Gr. word for "image" is *eikōn*, from which the Eng. word "icon" derives.

- It means, "copy" or "likeness." Jesus Christ is the perfect image—the exact likeness—of God and is in the very form of God (Phil. 2:6; cf. John 1:14; 14:9),
  - and has been so from all eternity.
- By describing Jesus in this manner, Paul emphasizes that He is both the representation and manifestation of God.
- Thus, He is fully God in every way (cf. 2:9; John 8:58; 10:30–33; Heb. 1:8).
- the firstborn over all creation. Cf. v. 18.
  - The Gr. word for "firstborn" can refer to one who was born first chronologically, but most often refers to pre-eminence in position, or rank (cf. Rom. 8:29).
  - In both Greek and Jewish culture, the firstborn was the ranking son who had received the right of inheritance from his father, whether he was born first or not.
  - It is used of Israel who, not being the first nation, was however the preeminent nation (cf. Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9).
  - Firstborn in this context clearly means highest in rank, not first created (cf. Ps. 89:27; Rev. 1:5) for several reasons:
    - 1. Christ cannot be both "first begotten" and "only begotten" (cf. John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9);
    - 2. when the "firstborn" is one of a class, the class is in the plural form (cf. v. 18; Rom. 8:29), but "creation," the class here, is in a singular form;
    - 3. if Paul was teaching that Christ was a created being, he was agreeing with the heresy he was writing to refute; and
    - 4. it is impossible for Christ to be both created, and the Creator of everything (v. 16).
- Thus Jesus is the firstborn in the sense that He has the preeminence (v. 18) and possesses the right of inheritance "over all creation" (cf. Heb. 1:2; Rev. 5:1–7, 13).
- He existed before the creation and is exalted in rank above it. *See notes* on *Ps. 2:7; Rom. 8:29.*
- Paul, in a very famous verse in 1 Tim. 1 said...

1 Tim 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

- Paul is here giving forth a great statement of praise to God concerning the Salvation God had granted him...
  - He wants us to know that, as far as he is concerned God is to receive all the praise for sovereignly saving Paul.
  - This is one of the many doxologies Paul wrote (cf. Rom. 11:33–36).
- Further in our discussion of the attributes of God, we come to some further revelation from God's Word (that we will discuss in some later posts...

We will discuss more of the attributes of God revealed in the Scripture in our next post.