

A REVELATION OF.....

THE

CHARACTER

OF GOD

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

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A NOTE FROM DAVID

How could one be so egotistical as to pretend to understand God's character? Not me! For that is what we Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, brought back into a relationship with God the Father and taught through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spend a lifetime learning!

I spent years reading the Bible, praying, and listening to those far more knowledgeable and spiritual than me, talk about God. My knowledge has grown gradually, a little like my understanding of my wife Kathy, over all the years I have lived with her. But as with Kathy, my understanding remains incomplete! And about God - at the very best, partial.

One day, in India with my friend Tony, praying about a Women's meeting I was to speak in, the Lord took me to the 'Love Chapter' in Corinthians. This is a difficult subject to talk to women about, for they have a considerably greater understanding of it than most of us men!

However, while reading the chapter to familiarize myself again, I was given the inspiration that I now share with you.

The meeting was powerful, the Holy Spirit anointing there in a truly special manner, and demons were released - not into the meeting, but audibly, from at least one of the ladies attending. An amazing time!

On that day I gained more practical understanding of God's character than I had ever had previously. It is my pleasure to share this with you.

I pray that it might have the same effect on you as it did upon me.

His servant and yours,
David Tait

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND

DEFINITIONS OF 'GOD'

GOD — (A.S. and Dutch God; Dan. Gud; Ger. Gott), the name of the Divine Being. It is the rendering (1) of the Hebrew *'El*, from a word meaning to be strong; (2) of *'Eloah*, plural *'Elohim*. The singular form, *Eloah*, is used only in poetry. The plural form is more commonly used in all parts of the Bible, The Hebrew word Jehovah (q.v.), the only other word generally employed to denote the Supreme Being, is uniformly rendered in the Authorized Version by “LORD,” printed in small capitals. The existence of God is taken for granted in the Bible. There is nowhere any argument to prove it. He who disbelieves this truth is spoken of as one devoid of understanding (Ps. 14:1).

The arguments generally adduced by theologians in proof of the being of God are:

(1.) The a priori argument, which is the testimony afforded by reason.

(2.) The a posteriori argument, by which we proceed logically from the facts of experience to causes. These arguments are,

(a) The cosmological, by which it is proved that there must be a First Cause of all things, for every effect must have a cause.

(b) The teleological, or the argument from design. We see everywhere the operations of an intelligent Cause in nature.

(c) The moral argument, called also the anthropological argument, based on the moral consciousness and the history of mankind, which exhibits a moral order and purpose which can only be explained on the supposition of the existence of God. Conscience and human history testify that “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.”

The attributes of God are set forth in order by Moses in Ex. 34:6,7. (see also Deut. 6:4; 10:17; Num. 16:22; Ex. 15:11; 33:19; Isa. 44:6; Hab. 3:6; Ps. 102:26; Job 34:12.) They are also systematically classified in Rev. 5:12 and 7:12.

God’s attributes are spoken of by some as absolute, i.e., such as belong to his essence as Jehovah, Jah, etc.; and relative, i.e., such as are ascribed to

him with relation to his creatures. Others distinguish them into communicable, i.e., those which can be imparted in degree to his creatures: goodness, holiness, wisdom, etc.; and incommunicable, which cannot be so imparted: independence, immutability, immensity, and eternity. They are by some also divided into natural attributes, eternity, immensity, etc.; and moral, holiness, goodness, etc. 1

GOD. God is and he may be known. These two affirmations form the foundation and inspiration of all religion. The first is an affirmation of faith, the second of experience. Since the existence of God is not subject to scientific proof, it must be a postulate of faith; and since God transcends all his creation, he can be known only in his self-revelation.

The Christian religion is distinctive in that it claims that God can be known as a personal God only in his self-revelation in the Scriptures. The Bible is written not to prove that God is, but to reveal him in his activities. For that reason, the biblical revelation of God is, in its nature, progressive, reaching its fullness in Jesus Christ his Son.

In the light of his self-revelation in the Scriptures, there are several affirmations that can be made about God.

I. His Being

In his Being God is self-existing. While his creation is dependent on him, he is utterly independent of the creation. He not only has life, but he is life to his universe, and has the source of that life within himself.

Very early in biblical history this mystery of God's being was revealed to Moses when, in the wilderness of Horeb, he met with God as fire in a bush (Ex. 3:2). The distinctive thing about that phenomenon was that 'the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed'. To Moses this must have meant that the fire was independent of its environment: it was self-fed. Such is God in his essential being: he is utterly independent of every environment in which he wills to make himself known. This quality of God's being probably finds expression in his personal name Yahweh, and

1Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

in his self-affirmation: 'I am who I am', that is, 'I am the one that has being within himself' (Ex. 3:14).

This perception was implied in Isaiah's vision of God: 'The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. . . . He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength' (Is. 40:28-29). He is the Giver, and all his creatures are receivers. Christ gave this mystery its clearest expression when he said: 'For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself' (Jn. 5:26). This makes independence of life a distinctive quality of deity. Throughout the whole of Scripture God is revealed as the Fountainhead of all there is, animate and inanimate, the Creator and Life-giver, who alone has life within himself.

II. His nature

In his nature God is pure spirit. Very early in his self-disclosure as the author of the created universe, God is represented as the Spirit who brought light out of darkness, and order out of chaos (Gn. 1:2-3). Christ made this disclosure of God as the object of our worship to the woman of Samaria: 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth' (Jn. 4:24). Between these two affirmations there are frequent references to the nature of God as pure spirit and as divine spirit. He is called the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9), and the combination 'the Spirit of the living God' is frequently used.

In this respect we must distinguish between God and his creatures that are spiritual. When we say that God is pure spirit, it is to emphasize that he is not part spirit and part body as man is. He is simple spirit without form or parts, and for that reason he has no physical presence. When the Bible speaks of God as having eyes, ears, hands and feet, it is an attempt to convey to us the senses that these physical parts convey, for if we do not speak of God in physical terms we could not speak of him at all. This, of course, does not imply any imperfection in God. Spirit is not a limited or restricted form of existence, it is the perfect unit of being.

When we say that God is infinite spirit, we pass completely out of the reach of our experience. We are limited as to time and place, as to knowledge and power. God is essentially unlimited, and every element of his nature is unlimited. His infinity as to time we call his *eternity*, as to

space his *omnipresence*, as to knowledge his *omniscience*, as to power his *omnipotence*.

His infinity likewise means that God is *transcendent* over his universe. It emphasizes his detachment as self-existing spirit from all his creatures. He is not shut in by what we call nature, but infinitely exalted above it. Even those passages of Scripture which stress his local and temporal manifestation lay emphasis also on his exaltation and omnipotence as a Being external to the world, its sovereign Creator and Judge (*cf.* Is. 40:12-17).

At the same time God's infinity implies his *immanence*. By this we mean his all-pervading presence and power within his creation. He does not stand apart from the world, a mere spectator of the work of his hands. He pervades everything, organic and inorganic, acting from within outwards, from the centre of every atom, and from the innermost springs of thought and life and feeling, a continuous sequence of cause and effect.

In such passages as Is. 57 and Acts 17 we have an expression of both God's transcendence and his immanence. In the first of these passages his transcendence finds expression as 'the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy', and his immanence as the one who dwells 'with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit' (Is. 57:15). In the second passage, Paul, in addressing the men of Athens, affirmed of the transcendent God that 'the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything', and then affirms his immanence as the one who 'is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'' (Acts 17:24, 28).

III. His character

God is personal. When we say this we assert that God is rational, self-conscious and self-determining, an intelligent moral agent. As supreme mind he is the source of all rationality in the universe. Since God's rational creatures possess independent character, God must be in possession of character that is divine both in its transcendence and immanence.

The OT reveals a personal God, both in terms of his own self-disclosure and of his people's relations with him, and the NT clearly shows

that Christ spoke to God in terms that were meaningful only in person to person relationship. For that reason we can predicate certain mental and moral qualities of God, such as we do of human character. Attempts have been made to classify the divine attributes under such headings as Mental and Moral, or Communicable and Incommunicable, or Related and Unrelated. Scripture would seem to give no support to any of these classifications, and in any case God is infinitely greater than the sum of all his attributes. *God's names are to us the designation of his attributes, and it is significant that God's names are given in the context of his people's needs. It would seem, therefore, more true to the biblical revelation to treat each attribute as a manifestation of God in the human situation that called it forth, compassion in the presence of misery, long-suffering in the presence of ill-desert, grace in the presence of guilt, mercy in the presence of penitence, suggesting that the attributes of God designate a relation into which he enters to those who feel their need of him. That bears with it the undoubted truth that God, in the full plenitude of his nature, is in each of his attributes, so that there is never more of one attribute than of another, never more love than justice, or more mercy than righteousness. If there is one attribute of God that can be recognized as all-comprehensive and all-pervading, it is his *holiness, which must be predicated of all his attributes, holy love, holy compassion, holy wisdom.

IV. His will

God is sovereign. That means that he makes his own plans and carries them out in his own time and way. That is simply an expression of his supreme intelligence, power and wisdom. It means that God's will is not arbitrary, but acts in complete harmony with his character. It is the forth-putting of his power and goodness, and is thus the final goal of all existence.

There is, however, a distinction between God's will which prescribes what we shall do, and his will which determines what he will do. Thus theologians distinguish between the *decretive will* of God by which he decrees whatsoever comes to pass, and his *preceptive will* by which he enjoins upon his creatures the duties that belong to them. The decretive will of God is thus always accomplished, while his preceptive will is often disobeyed.

When we conceive of the sovereign sway of the divine will as the final ground of all that happens, either actively bringing it to pass, or passively permitting it to come to pass, we recognize the distinction between the active will of God and his permissive will. Thus the entrance of sin into the world must be attributed to the permissive will of God, since sin is a contradiction of his holiness and goodness. There is thus a realm in which God's will to act is dominant, and a realm in which man's liberty is given permission to act. The Bible presents both in operation. The note which rings through the OT is that struck by Nebuchadrezzar: 'He does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What doest thou?'' (Dn. 4:35). In the NT we come across an impressive example of the divine will resisted by human unbelief, when Christ uttered his agonizing cry over Jerusalem: 'How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!' (Mt. 23:37). Nevertheless, the sovereignty of God ensures that all will be overruled to serve his eternal purpose, and that ultimately Christ's petition: 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' shall be answered.

It is true that we are not able to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's responsibility because we do not understand the nature of divine knowledge and comprehension of all the laws that govern human conduct. The Bible throughout teaches us that all life is lived in the sustaining will of God in whom we live and move and have our being', and that as a bird is free in the air, and a fish in the sea, so man has his true freedom in the will of God who created him for himself.

V. His subsistence

In his essential life God is a fellowship. This is perhaps the supreme revelation of God given in the Scriptures: it is that God's life is eternally within himself a fellowship of three equal and distinct persons, Father, Son and Spirit, and that in his relationship to his moral creation God was extending to them the fellowship that was essentially his own. That might perhaps be read into the divine dictum that expressed the deliberate will to create man: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,' that it was an expression of the will of God not only to reveal himself as a fellowship, but to make that life of fellowship open to the moral creatures made in his

image and so fitted to enjoy it. While it is true that man through sinning lost his fitness to enjoy that holy fellowship, it is also true that God willed to make it possible to have it restored to him. It has been observed, indeed, that this was probably the grand end of redemption, the revelation of God in Three Persons acting for our restoration, in electing love that claimed us, in redeeming love that emancipated us, and in regenerating love that recreated us for his fellowship. (*Trinity.)

VI. His Fatherhood

Since God is a Person he can enter into personal relationships, and the closest and tenderest is that of Father. It was Christ's most common designation for God, and in theology it is reserved specially for the first Person of the Trinity. There are four types of relationship in which the word Father is applied to God in Scripture.

There is his *Creational Fatherhood*. The fundamental relation of God to man whom he made in his own image finds its most full and fitting illustration in the natural relationship which involves the gift of life. Malachi, in calling his people to faithfulness to God and to consideration of one another, asks: 'Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?' (Mal. 2:10). Isaiah, in a plea to God not to forsake his people, cries: 'Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand' (Is. 64:8). But it is, more particularly, for man's spiritual nature that this relationship is claimed. In Hebrews God is called 'the Father of spirits' (12:9), and in Numbers 'the God of the spirits of all flesh' (16:22). Paul, when he preached from Mars' Hill, used this argument to drive home the irrationality of rational man worshipping idols of wood and stone, quoting the poet Aratus ('For we are indeed his offspring') to indicate that man is a creature of God. The creaturehood of man is thus the counterpart of the general Fatherhood of God. Without the Creator-Father there would be no race of man, no family of mankind.

There is the *Theocratic Fatherhood*. This is God's relationship to his covenant-people, Israel. In this, since it is a collective relationship that is indicated, rather than a personal one, Israel as a covenant-people was the child of God, and she was challenged to recognize and respond to this filial relationship: 'If then I am a father, where is my honour?' (Mal. 1:6). But since the covenant relationship was redemptive in its spiritual significance,

this may be regarded as a foreshadowing of the NT revelation of the divine Fatherhood.

There is *Generative Fatherhood*. This belongs exclusively to the second Person of the Trinity, designated the Son of God, and the only begotten Son. It is, therefore, unique, and not to be applied to any mere creature. Christ, while on earth, spoke most frequently of this relationship which was peculiarly his. God was his Father by eternal generation, expressive of an essential and timeless relationship that transcends our comprehension. It is significant that Jesus, in his teaching of the Twelve, never used the term 'Our Father' as embracing himself and them. In the resurrection message through Mary he indicated two distinct relationships: 'My Father, and your Father' (Jn. 20:17), but the two are so linked together that the one becomes the ground of the other. His Sonship, though on a level altogether unique, was the basis of their sonship.

There is also the *Adoptive Fatherhood*. This is the redeeming relationship that belongs to all believers, and in the context of redemption it is viewed from two aspects, that of their standing in Christ, and that of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in them. This relationship to God is basic to all believers, as Paul reminds the Galatian believers: 'For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith' (Gal. 3:26). In this living union with Christ they are adopted into the family of God, and they become subjects of the regenerative work of the Spirit that bestows upon them the nature of children: one is the objective aspect, the other the subjective. Because of their new standing (justification) and relationship (adoption) to God the Father in Christ, they become partakers of the divine nature and are born into the family of God. John made this clear in the opening chapter of his Gospel: 'To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power (authority) to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God' (Jn. 1:13). And so they are granted all the privileges that belong to that filial relationship: 'if children, then heirs' is the sequence (Rom. 8:17).

It is clear that Christ's teaching on the Fatherhood of God restricts the relationship to his believing people. In no instance is he reported as assuming this relationship to exist between God and unbelievers. Not only does he not give a hint of a redeeming Fatherhood of God towards all men,

but he said pointedly to the cavilling Jews: ‘You are of your father the devil’ (Jn. 8:44).

While it is under this relationship of Father that the NT brings out the tenderest aspects of God’s character, his love, his faithfulness, his watchful care, it also brings out the responsibility of our having to show God the reverence, the trust and the loving obedience that children owe to a father. Christ has taught us to pray not only ‘Our Father’, but ‘Our Father who art in heaven’, thus inculcating reverence and humility.

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2The New Bible Dictionary, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

***PART 2: A REVELATION OF.....
THE CHARACTER OF GOD***

THIS REVELATION' S PURPOSE

I cannot pretend to have the knowledge and understanding of a theologian, for I am not one! Nor is this a full and complete explanation of God' s character, for we won' t obtain that until we join Him in eternity. Even then, I suspect He might surprise us occasionally!

However this simple, but for me, hugely deep and meaningful explanation, has increased my understanding of Him so much. It has shown that the character God desires in us, is simply a replication of His own.

If only it were so easy to live!

THE LOVE CHAPTER

1 CORINTHIANS 13

13 *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-13) 3

3 All scriptures are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984 unless otherwise specified.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

As I prayed for help in what to share about the Love Chapter with the Indian Women' s Group, the Lord said, "To understand my character, substitute the word ' love' with my name."

"But God, surely this is altering scripture?"

"Just do it!"

And I did.

The result was, and is, hugely powerful!

Later, when looking more deeply into the definitions of the word ' love' used in this chapter, I realized that this substitution provides a beautiful picture of God placing His character in us.

Let' s look at verse 1 in the Amplified Bible.

If I (can) speak in the tongues of men and (even) of angels, but have not love (that reasoning, intentional, spiritual devotion such as is inspired by God's love for and in us), I am only a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1)

In following verses, an abbreviated version restates this so succinctly....

And if I have prophetic powers (the gift of interpreting the divine will and purpose), and understand all the secret truths and mysteries and possess all knowledge, and if I have (sufficient) faith so that I can remove mountains, but have not love (God's love in me) I am nothing (a useless nobody). (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Yes, it is God' s love we are to have in us. So the aspects of God' s love, His character, are detailed here when ' **God**'s substituted for ' love.'

13 *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not **God**, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not **God**, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not **God**, I gain nothing. ⁴ **God** is patient, **God** is kind. **He** does not envy, **He** does not boast, **He** is not proud. ⁵ **He** is not rude, **He** is not self-seeking, **He** is not easily angered, **He** keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ **God** does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ **He** always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ **God** never fails.*
(1 Corinthians 13:1-8a)

What a beautiful picture of God! How he so desires us to become like him.

This is confirmed through the apostle, John, the one whom Jesus loved.

⁷ *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)*

Early in our ministry, prior to this revelation being received, my wife Kathy and I visited Uganda. It was in a village there, that I first preached a Sunday sermon on these aspects of love. Thought I had done quite well and afterwards asked Kathy for her confirmation.

"Was long and boring," she replied! I don't ask her now! (Just joking!) Surely - she was tired!

So I won't take the risk of boring you too, but simply ask that you take each aspect of God's character revealed here and meditate upon it further.

My earnest prayer though, is for a renewed enthusiasm and determination to apply these characteristics to our own life, so that we might truly grow into the image of Jesus. After all, He was God dwelling amongst us!