

The Church of God, International
Bible Correspondence Course

LESSON 4

Knowing God: Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

In the last two lessons we made a start on understanding the nature and being of God. Where is God and who is He? We started with the premise that God can be known and understood, but only in the terms in which He chooses to reveal Himself. We dealt with the apparent conflict between the Old Testament that insists that there is only one God, and the New Testament that tells us that there are two who are called God. Then, we looked carefully at the identity of the one in the Old Testament who is called Jehovah.

We learned that in the early centuries after Christ, some theologians concluded that God was a "Trinity," that He existed as three in one. Neither the word *trinity* nor any direct suggestion of a divine Trinity is found in the Bible, but they reasoned that it had to be so. They concluded that God is one being, composed of three persons. The semantic discussions revolving around this are endless. Is God one person with three modes of existence? Is God one individual with three faces? To further confuse the issue, words have been borrowed from the Greek. God is said to be one being or person composed of three *hypostases*

. Everything about the doctrine of the Trinity seems designed to turn God into a mystery, an enigma that man cannot understand. And what a man cannot understand, he cannot relate to. Yet God intends that man not only know and understand Him, He intends that man *relate* to Him.

In these lessons, we go to the Bible to dispel the mystery and to bring the divine Being within the grasp of anyone.

JESUS CHRIST: IS HE GOD?

John 1:1-34

1. Does this passage tell us when "the Word" originated?
2. What does the expression "the Word was with God" mean?
3. How is it possible for the Word to be "with God" and to "be God" at the same time?
4. Was the Word involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth? (see verses 3,10)
5. The Word (also called "the Light") came into the world. Was it recognized for what it was?
6. The Word came unto "His own." Who were "His own"?
7. When the Word came into the world, was it as a spiritual manifestation, or as flesh and

blood?

8. When in the world, what was the relationship of the Word to the Father?
9. According to John, how many men have, at any time, seen God?
10. Who, then, revealed God to man?
11. What was the role of John the Baptist relative to the coming of Christ?
12. Who exactly was the "Word made flesh"?
13. How did John describe the primary work of Jesus?
14. Did John, in his declaration of Christ, acknowledge that Jesus would be a sacrificial lamb--that He would die?
15. What was John's official "bearing of record" relative to Jesus?

Note: "Word" in the Greek is *logos*, which means "word" or "spokesman." In the Old Testament, no man ever saw the Father. What they saw was His Messenger, who spoke in His name. The "Jehovah" that Abraham talked with was the "Word" of God, the One who became Jesus Christ in the flesh.

Colossians 1:12-20

Once again we are presented with Father and Son. Read carefully noting the relationship between pronoun and antecedent.

16. Into whose kingdom are we to be "translated"?
17. In whose blood have we redemption?
18. Who is the "Image of the invisible God"?
19. Who is the "Firstborn of every creature"?
20. By whom were all things created?
21. Who is "before all things"?
22. Who is the Head of the church? (see also Ephesians 1:22 and 5:23)
23. Who is the Firstborn from the dead?
24. In whom is all fullness to dwell?

Note: Here, there is no mistaking what Paul is saying: Jesus existed before all things in this physical world. Not only that, with the Father He was the active Agent in creating all things.

Revelation 1:9-20

25. When John fell into vision, he saw One who made the claim of being the Alpha and Omega. What did this mean? (verse 11)
26. Who did John see in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks?
27. Did He claim to be the "First and the Last"?
28. Had this One been dead, and raised to life?
29. Who was this?
30. Who else made the claim to be the First and the Last? (See Isaiah 44:6).
31. Did the Alpha and Omega claim also to be the Almighty? (Revelation 1:8)

John 6:25-71

32. Who or what was the "Bread of Life"?
33. Where did Jesus come from? (verse 38)
34. What was the result of eating of the Bread of Life?
35. How did His disciples react to this explanation of the Bread of Life?
36. When Jesus spoke of ascending up to where he was before, where might that have been?

So it is clear that Jesus' origins antedated his physical birth. He came from heaven, and He expected to return there.

John 8:51-59

37. What made the Jews say that Jesus had a devil?
38. Did Jesus claim to have seen Abraham?
39. Did Jesus claim to have existed before Abraham?
40. How did the Jews respond to this claim?

Note: The attempt to stone Jesus is evidence that the Jews believed Jesus guilty of blasphemy. The claim to have preexisted Abraham meant to them that Jesus was claiming to be God.

41. Did Jesus claim to have existed with the Father before the foundation of the world? (John 17:5)
42. Did Jesus accept worship? (Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 28:9)
43. Did Jesus come into existence when He was born of Mary? (Matthew 2:6, with Micah 5:2)

Hebrews 6:19-20

44. Was Jesus to be a priest?
45. Of what rank or in what order?

Hebrews 7:1-28

46. When did Melchizedek first appear on the scene? (see also Genesis 14:17-20)
47. What were the titles of Melchizedek?
48. How long had Melchizedek been a priest?
49. Was Melchizedek greater or lesser than Abraham?
50. As a priest, was Melchizedek greater or lesser than Levi?
51. What is the proof offered for this?
52. Under the Law of Moses Jesus could not have been a priest. Why? (verse 14).
53. What sort of change in the law is necessitated by a change in the priesthood?
54. Would the one authorized to receive the tithes be changed?
55. From what tribe did Jesus come? (verse 14)
56. What commandment was disannulled? (verse 18)
57. Was it ever possible to achieve perfection by the law? (verse 19).
58. What, then, was the purpose of the law? (see also Romans 3:20)
59. Is Christ's priesthood temporary?

THE HOLY SPIRIT

When it comes time to understand the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost, as some prefer), we are posed with some different problems. It was no great challenge to understand the Father and the Son. These are ideas within our own experience. Not so the Holy Spirit. This is the closest thing to a mystery in the study of God.

Once again, we find ourselves struggling with the meaning of words; and this time, poetry and imagery are involved. First, consider the difference in the way these ideas are presented to us. Father and Son are concepts we easily understand. They are Persons. We are like them. We are made in their image. Every revelation of God allows us, even encourages us, to think of Him in human terms.

Not so the Holy Spirit. In the first place, the Greek word for it suggests something other than a person. "Spirit" in the Greek is *pneuma*, from which we derive the word pneumatic. The word roughly means air, wind, or breath. One source called the Holy Spirit "the Breath of Jehovah."

To get a feeling for the word, read the following passage, and substitute "wind" for "spirit." That is the way the passage would read to someone reading it in the original language, for the word *pneuma* is translated both as "spirit" and as "wind" in this passage.

John 3:1-8

60. In suggesting that a rebirth is required, is Jesus saying that it is a different kind of birth?

61. How does one who is born of the Spirit differ from one who is born of the flesh?

62. Is the Spirit presented as more like a person, or more like an amorphous (i.e., without body) essence?

When we consider this, we can begin to understand why some translators use the phrase "Holy Ghost." They saw the Spirit in rather different terms from the Father and the Son--more like an amorphous vapor.

63. Visible manifestations of the Spirit are rare. When it does happen, how is the Holy Spirit presented? (Matthew 3:16; Acts 2:1-4)

Note: The Spirit is presented, not as a person, but "like a dove." The latter passage once again uses "wind" and says the disciples were "filled" with the Spirit--the figure of speech calls to mind, not a person, but a fluid. "Fire" is another image of the Spirit.

Traditionally, as we have seen, God has been viewed as a Trinity. According to this view, God is one being, composed of three persons. These persons must relate to one another in special ways--Father and Son, for example.

64. Who is the Father of Jesus? (Matthew 1:18)

65. If the Holy Spirit is a person, why is it not the father of Jesus? (Luke 1:35)

Note: The Holy Spirit is called "the power of the Highest." It is not a distinct person as

are the Father and the Son. It is rather the power of God emanating from the Father and the Son, and is God's active agent in the world. To say that the Holy Spirit is not a person is not to say that it is impersonal. It is the agency of God Himself. Agency is defined as a means of exerting power or influence--an instrumentality.

Luke 11:15-20; Matthew 12:26-28

- 66. Are these two passages describing the same event?
- 67. What, then, is the "finger of God"?
- 68. Is a God's finger a *person*?

II Corinthians 3:1-18

- 69. Who or what was Paul's "letter of recommendation"?
 - 70. Who wrote that letter?
 - 71. Where was it written?
 - 72. It was not written with ink. With what was it written?
 - 73. On what was the administration of death written?
 - 74. How did the glory of the administration of the Spirit differ from the glory of the administration of death?
 - 75. Who, exactly, is "that Spirit" in this passage?
 - 76. Where is God when we pray to Him?
 - 77. Where is Christ today? (Hebrews 12:2)
 - 78. Does God dwell in us? (I John 4:12,13)
 - 79. Does Christ dwell in us? (Romans 8:10,11)
 - 80. How is it possible for the Father and Christ to dwell in us and be in heaven at the same time? (I Corinthians 3:16,17)
- Note: They dwell in us in the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is not a third person dwelling in us, but the very essence of God Himself.

I Corinthians 2:9-16

- 81. What is it that enables a man to understand "the things of a man"--that is, what elevates the mind of man above the mind of a beast?
 - 82. If the spirit of a man equates to the mind of man, what then is the Spirit of God?
 - 83. What is it that endows us with the "mind of Christ"?
- Note: We believe that the Holy Spirit is personal, because it is an extension of God Himself. It is the way in which God can be omnipresent--that is, He can be on His throne and be in us at the same time. He dwells in us by His Spirit. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit is a third person, a third mind. The Holy Spirit is the spiritual presence, activity, power, and influence of God in the natural world.

Romans 8:11-28

- 84. What is the power Christ will use to raise our mortal bodies at the last day?
- 85. What is it that determines whether we are sons of God?

86. Is there an interaction between God's Spirit and our own? What does it do?

87. What is our relationship with God?

88. What is it that we ourselves are groaning for?

89. How does the Spirit make intercession for us?

Note: The Spirit does this by empowering us, by "helping our infirmities." It does not do this apart from us as a third party intercessor, but through us and through our minds.

90. Who is it that makes intercession for us? (Hebrews 7:25)

91. Who is it that searches the heart?

Note: He that searches the hearts is the same One that makes intercession for us--Christ. He knows "the mind of the spirit" within us.

There is a peculiarity of language that confuses many who study this subject. Take, for example, John 14:16,17. Here, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "the Comforter" and uses the pronoun "he" in connection with it. This leads some to feel that the Holy Spirit is a person, because if it were not, the passage would use the pronoun "it."

In the Greek language, nouns that would be neuter in English are often masculine or feminine. If the noun is masculine, the pronouns following it must also be masculine. Take the word rock, for example. In Greek, there are two words for "rock," one masculine and one feminine. You would speak of the rock as "he" or "she" depending upon which word you use. There is no neuter gendered "rock" in Greek.

But besides all that, the Holy Spirit is not something other than God. It is the power of God, the breath of God. The mind of the Spirit is the mind of God. When the Holy Spirit acts, it is God who is acting.

IN CONCLUSION

Man's old idea was of a solitary God. Alone. Aloof. Without peer. Without heir. They thought He was a God who would have said, as James Weldon Johnson put it, "I'm lonely; I'll make me a world." He was alone from eternity and would remain alone for eternity. At a festival, He would dine alone.

But then came the Son, and some, still holding to their solitary God, created a Trinity--a God who, though three faceted, was still alone, and who would remain alone. The three sides of the Trinity present a closed Godhead--One that could be adored, but never joined. At a festival, the three would dine as one--alone. God's family could never increase.

But when we read the Bible, we find a God who, far from being alone for eternity, seems determined not to be alone at all. He is a Father. He has a Son who is *like* Him. He intends to have more sons who will be like Him. At festival time, He will be surrounded by family.

Scientists tell us the universe has been here for 15 billion years. What has God been doing? Is this the *first* time He has done this? Will it be the last?

God has placed in all his creatures a *reproductive imperative* . Each of his creatures, great and small, must reproduce "after his kind." It is odd how man, who has the same imperative, and is made in the image of God, misses the point when it comes to what God is doing. God, also, is reproducing *after His kind*.

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