

# Dartmouth

## Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 20

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4; Ephesians 4:6

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018

### *The Unity of God*

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9** (ESV) “Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

**Ephesians 4:4-6** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **one God and Father of all**, who is over all and through all and in all.

**Introduction** As we near the completion of this pulpit series on the attributes of God, I realize that one reason I have opted for this subject is because it is clean. By “clean” I mean that it is simple and it is only about God. It is laced with no political undertones or passive-aggressive hidden agendas (as preachers sometimes fall prey to). It has not been about issues or even about some trendy crisis in the Christian life. It has been about Him. There is something very appealing to me about that. *But* if ever you *again* hear a pulpit series again on “the attributes of God”, and you may—it is unlikely that you will hear this topic spoken of, of which we shall speak today. It is a somewhat obscure attribute that has been written about and thought about through the centuries but it isn't one of the more popular ones to speak about—as would be love, holiness, mercy, power and so forth. But I have chosen this one today—**UNITY**—because I think it

to be one of the most important and one of the most honoring to God to lay out from a pulpit.<sup>1</sup>

As I sat in the coffee shop late Thursday afternoon, again I was struck in seeing a young man that I know—a college student—working on classwork. He is a smart young man, attending Cornell University. But his mind could not have been farther from God. I don't know if he believes in God... And I prayed for him that afternoon to find God; to become as I did at his age, entranced and enchanted and captured and in love with this one God that I stumbled across!

To set it up for you in a modern context and so there is no confusion at all, let me show *what we do NOT mean* by the “unity of God.” There are churches called “unity” churches. One good example is near where I grew up and to which I have two good friends from high school who attend. It is apparently a very happy community which has these five principles which define them:

1. God is the only true presence and power in the Universe.
2. We are individualized expressions of God; our divine potential and spiritual essence are called the Christ.
3. We create our reality through the thoughts we hold in consciousness.
4. We become aware of our oneness with God through prayer and meditation.
5. We must put spiritual truth into practice in order to change our lives.<sup>2</sup>

But I must make it clear that what we are saying God is, is NOT that.

The unity of God is this:

- One God in trinity and in unity (Athanasian Creed, c 500 AD)<sup>3</sup>
- Absolutely single in absolute simplicity, uncompounded of other more basic things (Heinrich Schmid, evangelical Lutheran, 1875)
- God's nature is undivided and indivisible, and that there is but one infinite and perfect Spirit (A.H. Strong 1907)
- Oneness in essence, utterly unique (S. Lewis Johnson, c. 1976).
- Not divided into or composed of parts (Wayne Grudem, 1994)

We have been saying all along that God is clearly God. He is Who He is. He is not up for a referendum nor is His nature a cocktail of the preferable traits of

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the half-dozen theologians I consulted on this subject I was blessed to find, quite by accident, a one-hour message (with a 22 page PDF transcript) on this very topic by the man who was in fact the most revered and respected theologian in my early years in the ministry, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. He had mentored *my* mentors!

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unityoffairfax.org/what-unity>

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I 1948.

all the religions. This places us completely out of step with the progressive elements and hipper thinkers of our time. But He was here, and everywhere before we were. And He will be here when we are not. To reject the classic Judeo-Christian understanding of who He is not some noble, enlightened state—it is just unbelief. He is Who He is. I can't get over that. Our job is not to figure Him out—it is to proclaim Him as He has revealed Himself. We're just passing on the news.

And the news today is exactly and precisely and immutably what it was when He spoke to Moses in, say, 1,300 years before Christ. And Moses proclaimed (what Jews call “the Great Shema”: **Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.** (Deut. 6:4)

SHEMA Y'ISHRAEL YHWH ELOHINO, YHWH EKHAT.



שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו  
יהוה אחד

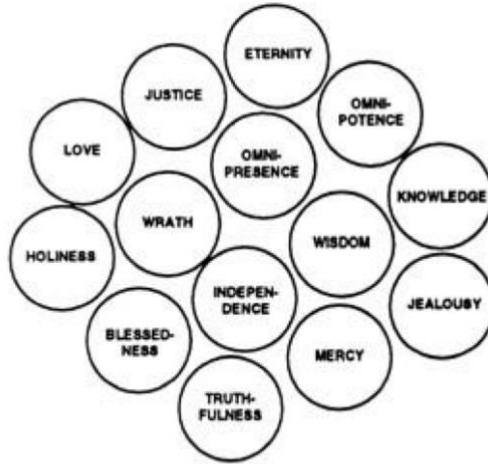
The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, in a very “hip” and cosmopolitan ancient city (4:4-6)-- **There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

To us, we take this for granted. And I find it comforting that theologians also call this attribute of “unity” a word that is cool; the simplicity of God. He is Who He is. He is one. It couldn't be more plain and unencumbered.

But in the time that Moses lived, monotheism was rare. Even in Jesus' day it was not common. And God insisted and insists today that His unity is absolute. There is only one God and He is Who He is. He is utterly unique and He is not a sum of various parts. That is why it is almost counterproductive to consider His attributes individually.

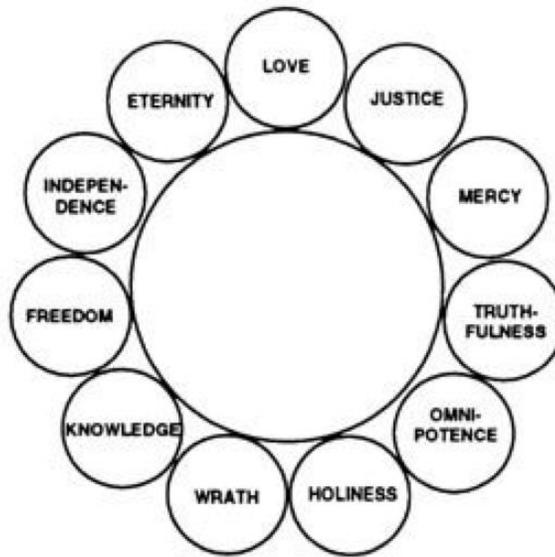
Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* offers a series of graphic depictions to try to get us to something of an understanding of His unity.

He says God is not like this:



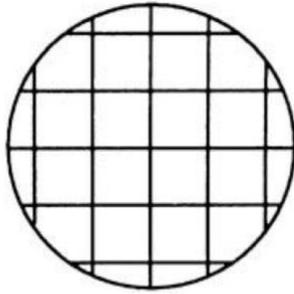
**GOD’S BEING IS NOT A COLLECTION OF ATTRIBUTES ADDED TOGETHER**

Nor should we think of His attributes as something external from His real being or real self, or as something added on to who God really is...

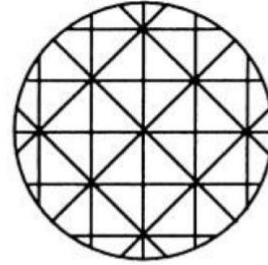


**GOD’S ATTRIBUTES ARE NOT ADDITIONS TO HIS REAL BEING**

Rather, we must remember that God’s whole being includes ALL of His attributes: He is entirely loving, entirely merciful, entirely just and so forth. Every attribute of God that we find in Scripture is true of all of God’s being and therefore we can say that every attribute of God qualifies every other attribute. Grudem says we could look at it like this:



GOD'S LOVE AND JUSTICE



GOD'S LOVE, JUSTICE, HOLINESS, AND WISDOM

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson then brought this into our daily lives. If God is Who He is and He expects and invites us, in Christ, to know Him *as He is* (Not all are interested in this invitation), WE **1** MUST AVOID IDOLATRY. And we are much more capable of idolatry than we think. To place anything as more important than God is to dishonor Him as He is. To think that God is an amalgam of all the cool stuff that all the religions proclaim is to blaspheme the true and solitary God. His singleness—His unity—has no room for other, imagined priorities. We must bring Him into our daily lifestyles.

**2** Secondly Dr. Johnson said that if God is One, and exists in an elegant and inestimably powerful simplicity and that He is the God Who is ***of all***, and ***over all***, and ***in all*** and ***through all*** (as Paul wrote that He IS to the Ephesians), then WE SHOULD WORSHIP HIM. We should focus on Him, subordinate ourselves to Him, obey Him and love Him. It only makes sense to have an attitude of worship and NOT just be about ourselves and interested in ourselves.

There are so many places in Scripture where this is the prescribed lifestyle as believers in Christ. In the Old Testament a very dramatic confrontation occurs in I Kings 18. This is where Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal—and by the way there were a bunch of different “Baals.” This is one of the most courageous stories in the whole Old Testament. Elijah says “bring it on.”

There are amazing words from God all through the middle chapters of Isaiah. As God speaks about “other gods” (44:6-8) He is a little biting in what He said (which doesn't bother me since I decided for myself that He is the only God):

***Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before***

**me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”** And we could cite many, many other places in the Scripture where the same insistence is laid out.

As I said before this attribute of God (Dr. Johnson said he preferred the word “perfection” of God), places us plainly out of step with the culture of *diversity* which we’re living in. The prevailing preference and it is quickly becoming an intolerance, is that everybody much acknowledge everybody else’s gods and even be glad about them and even morph their theology into a new theology of “everybody has some truth” to contribute and all are equally valid.

The Romans and the Greeks and the Egyptians before said the same kind of thing, in the days of Paul and in the days of Isaiah and in the days of Moses.

What do you say? Is it OK that God is Who He is.

- Is it OK that there is none other?
- Is it OK that He insists that He is the only God and that He is *singular* and will share His glory with none other?
- Is it OK that He has not changed in thousands of years and in fact, never changes?
- Is that alright with you? It is an awesome God that we worship and serve. But He loves us, and He sacrificed an incredible thing to win us back from our own sin. He gave His only begotten Son that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but would have everlasting life! Let’s honor Him with this old hymn...

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.

All praise we would render; O help us to see  
’Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee,  
And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,  
Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ to the heart.

Alternative song:

*Hast Thou Not  
Seen Hast Thou  
Not Heard?*



A positive path for spiritual living.  
We honor all paths to God.

**The Five Basic Principles of Unity**

1. God is the only true presence and power in the Universe.
2. We are individualized expressions of God; our divine potential and spiritual essence are called the Christ.
3. We create our reality through the thoughts we hold in consciousness.
4. We become aware of our oneness with God through prayer and meditation.
5. We must put spiritual truth into practice in order to change our lives.



## I Kings 18

### **ISAIAH 44:6-8**

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."