Believe: Who Is God?
Genesis 1:1, 26-27; John 15:26

We are at the end of Week 1 on our journey called BELIEVE, and the question of the week is, “Who Is God?” For those who have been reading in the BELIEVE book and/or participating in the BELIEVE group studies, you have already read several scriptures and discussed this question in your groups. My intent this morning will be to briefly review what we have read/discussed this week, and then address why our understanding of God is so incredibly important to every aspect of our existence.

Pastor Randy Frazee, in his book called BELIEVE, makes three key observations that are supported in scripture: 1) God reveals Himself; 2) God is the One, True God; and 3) God reveals Himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these points are worthy of our consideration.

First, God reveals Himself. God gets to define God’s self…we do not have the liberty or the privilege of defining God’s nature or God’s identity. Now…I know this point is obvious for believers, but this point is contentious for unbelievers. Why? Because the unbeliever often begins with the premise that selfishly motivated men made up the scriptures, fashioning a god in their preferred image. Many people in our culture are convinced that “the gods” are nothing more than myths and fairy tales created by men to explain things that ultimately could not be explained in antiquity but now are explained by modern science. That is actually a fair observation as we study the myriads of idols and religions around the world. So, what makes the Christian faith any different from all the other religions who made up stories about so called “gods?”

The difference is what we call “special revelation.” What Christians believe to be true about God is revealed in the scriptures…which are very old and have essentially remained unchanged for thousands of years. To this day, Christians form their understanding about God through that which we believe was revealed to us by God through the writers of the Old and New Testaments…writers who, we believe, were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God to record the history of God’s revelation in His activity, His speech, His people, and most specifically His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. The authority of the Old and New Testament ultimately hinges upon the resurrection of Jesus three days after his public execution. Jesus believed the scriptures to be the Word of God, and Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. So because Jesus rose again…which is unprecedented in all of human history, the authority of the scriptures are validated. Now, the special revelation of scripture stands in contrast to the practice of making up our own gods based upon the way that we intuitively think gods should behave, or somehow limiting the nature of god to that which we can see and intuit through observing the natural world. We can certainly observe the majesty of God in nature, as Paul writes in Romans 1:20, “For God’s invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, every since
the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” However, we cannot know the specific identity of God by observing nature…we need God’s special revelation as found in the scriptures.

So, what does the Bible say about Who God Is? When we look to Genesis 1:1 we read, “In the beginning, God…” The Bible never makes an argument for the existence of God…God’s existence is assumed. Before anything was, God IS. God is INFINITE. God was not created. There was never a time when God did not exist, but there was a time when EVERYTHING else did not exist…that was the time before “the beginning.” Now…it hurts the brain when we try to conceive of God as infinite. In fact, when Christians confess, “God created the heavens and the earth,” the atheist famously responds, “But who created God?” That question reflects an assumption that everything that exists had to be caused or created, and so it is an impossible task to get to a “starting place” if even God had to be created. However, the Bible reveals that God is the great I AM. No one created God…God was, God is, God will always be.

As we look further into Genesis 1 we read, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” God is the Creator. God speaks creation into existence. Before the beginning there was nothing in terms of time, matter, energy, or particles…there was only God. But then, at the beginning, God creates “ex nihilo,”…out of nothing. Only an infinite, all powerful God can create something out of nothing, and that is exactly who the God of the Bible is…God is the infinite, Creator God.

Are there many gods…one for each season, one for the rain and the sun, one for hunting and one for growing good crops, a god of love and a god of war? No. According to the scriptures, God is ONE, and He is the only ONE TRUE GOD. In Deut. 6:4-5, Moses teaches the Shemah…the prayer that would be said every day, several times a day, by the people of God: “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 strength.” When Jesus was asked what was the most important commandment in Mark 12:28, Jesus answers in Mark 12:29 by quoting Deut. 6, “Jesus answered, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Now, we’ve seen the scriptures reveal that God is one, but the scriptures also reveal an interesting twist that is mind-blowing and completely unique to the Judeo-Christian faith. The scriptures reveal that God is one in essence, but that God exists in three different “persons.” Our first clue to God’s plurality is found in Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Again in Genesis 3:22 we read, “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us…”

For a religion that was famously MONOTHEISTIC…having only ONE true God in every sense of the word, to hear the Lord God say, “Us” is mind-blowing. Who is the “us” that God speaks of

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in Genesis? Some theorize that God is speaking to the angels, but we have no evidence to suggest that the angels, who were themselves created, had anything to do with the creation of human beings. We do have evidence, however, that the Spirit of God and the Son of God were present at the beginning. In Genesis 1:2 we read, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” We read later in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” The Word, the Logos, is the way that John refers to Jesus. So Jesus was present at the creation of the world, along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The picture of God throughout the Bible reveals that God is one in essence and being, and yet God exists as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From what we can gather in the scriptures, God has always existed as the three in one. Now…don’t pretend that this concept of one essence and three persons does not hurt your brain…it totally does, and it should! Any metaphor or illustration that we come up with to try help explain the mystery of what we call the “Trinity” is going to fall short. I’ve heard people use illustrations like, “I’m a son, a father, and a brother…but I’m always just me.” Wrong…terribly wrong…please do not think of God in this way. God is not like the three parts of an egg…God is not like water in three different states. Please stop with the metaphors! Listen: God is three unique persons…and yet God is one. Look to the baptism of Jesus that we find recorded in Mark 1:10-11, “And when he (Jesus) came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” There are three different persons acting in this scene: Jesus the beloved Son is coming up out of the water; the Holy Spirit is descending out of heaven like a dove; and the Father is speaking praise about His son, Jesus. Three persons, totally loving, adoring, and celebrating each other, and yet the Bible insists that these are not three gods, but the perfect, eternal expression of the One True God.

Now…here’s a quick aside to the skeptic. If you are going to make up a god-story, and you want to set yourself apart from all the polytheistic religions of the ancient world by insisting that “the Lord our God is ONE,” why in the world would you have that ONE God refer to Himself as “us” and then have Him share the stage with the Holy Spirit and Jesus, both of whom are referred to as God, who both receive worship, and who both are sent from God as God for the benefit of human beings? There is a complexity in the biblical witness that bends the mind and makes us wonder, “Where did that come from?” What ancient group of authors (since there were many contributors to the Bible over thousands of years) could come up with such a mind-blowing concept of one God in three persons, and WHY would they hold to such a claim? In no other religion anywhere in the world do we have this “Trinitarian” concept of God, and yet the plurality of the One God is presented in both the Old and New Testaments…the writers of which lived thousands of years apart from each other. This is a very significant argument for why we
view the scriptures as God’s self-revelation, and as such, why we view the scriptures as sacred and set apart from all other forms of literature and completely unique as compared to other “religious texts.” The scriptures reveal a mind-blowing mystery about God’s nature that is too complex, too profound for the human mind to grasp. James Emory White says it this way: The Trinity is a truth that tests our dedication to the principle that God is smarter than we are. As strange as that may sound, I truly believe that in most instances where a religious group denies the Trinity, the reason can be traced back to the founder’s unwillingness to admit the simple reality that God is bigger than we can ever imagine. That is really what Christians have always meant when they use the term “mystery” of the Trinity. The term has never meant that the Trinity is an inherently irrational thing. Instead, it simply means that we realize that God is completely unique in the way He exists, and there are elements of His being that are simply beyond our meager mental capacity to comprehend. The fact that God is eternal is another facet of His being that is beyond us. We cannot really grasp eternity, nor how God exists eternally rather than in time. Yet this truth is revealed to us in Scripture, and we believe it on the logical basis that God is trustworthy. It is a “mystery” that we accept on the basis of faith in God’s revelation.”

Now…that last line may sound like the “blind faith” cop-out that our skeptic friends reject…but it’s not. Christianity never calls for blind faith; but when it comes to accepting that there is truth beyond our comprehension, faith is required because our human understanding has limitations.

OK…let’s stop here for a minute and take a stretch break. To answer the question, “Who Is God?” is heady business, but it’s super, super, super important. A. W. Tozier writes, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” There is more we could say about who God is, but I would like to spend the last part of my message unpacking the significance of what we’ve already observed because that’s where “the rubber meets the road.” Fair warning…I’m going to totally geek out on you this morning. I am going to share with you one of the key intellectual arguments that helped restore my faith after my intellectual meltdown in seminary. I know, for some of you, this will be a good time to take a nap. But for others, this may be an insight that answers some of your most important questions…I hope it helps. Let me begin by saying this: Most people in our culture are not clear about who God is; and as a result, they are unclear about everything else. Why? Because what we believe to be true about God affects EVERYTHING else in terms of our worldview.

Remember that our worldview is simply our philosophy…our personal narrative for how things are, how it got to be this way, and what we plan to do about it. You know what that means, right? It means we are all philosophers! You are a philosopher, whether you have a PhD in philosophy or you are uneducated and unemployed. Every human being is a philosopher…we all operate on a philosophy, a worldview, that serves as the operating system by which we process information, make decisions, and live our lives.

Now, any school of philosophy has three main concerns: the question of being; the question of morality; and the question of knowing. In other words, philosophy asks, “How do we account for
the fact that we exist as we actually are? How do we account for the nobility and cruelty of human existence? And how do we come to know things?"

On account of time, let’s just look at the first question of our personal philosophy because it’s incredibly important: how do we account for the fact that things exist as they actually are? How do we account for the universe, how do we account for living things vs. non-living things, how do we account for the unity of all things that are all comprised of matter, and how do we account for the diversity that we observe in living things that are impersonal as opposed to living things (human beings) that are personal?

In his brilliant little book entitled, *He Is There and He is Not Silent*, the Christian philosopher and writer Francis Schaeffer addresses these philosophical questions. According to Schaeffer, you can read every philosophy and every religion known to man, but in the end there are only two classes of answers to how things came to be as they are. The first class of answer is this: there is no logical rational answer. Those who hold to this worldview insist that everything is absurd, everything is ultimately irrational and unknowable. In light of human history, this perspective is relatively recent and it is famously championed by a handful of existentialist writers, poets, and artists. Schaeffer insists that this position cannot be consistently held or lived out by its adherents for a number of reasons. First, the universe as it is could never be described as chaotic, random, or irrational. On the contrary, modern science has observed that the universe is quite ordered and “finely tuned” to sustain life on earth. We can observe that the laws of physics such as gravity, the speed of light, and atomic energy are quite dependable, and mathematics are generally fixed and unchanging. Let us also agree that reason is known through language. That’s a problem for the chaos theory, because the case for an irrational universe must be communicated in rational thought through words! Schaeffer writes, “…if this position were argued properly, all discussions would come to an end. Communication would end. We would have only a series of meaningless sounds—blah, blah, blah.” He points out that those who write materials, paint pictures, or perform plays that portray the impossible nature of communication in the irrational universe are always communicating that there is no communication! Thus their claims of an irrational universe are selectively set aside when it comes to publishing their own books! In short, the irrational cosmos worldview does not hold up under scrutiny because it is inconsistent with the way things actually are and the way people actually live.

The second class of answer to the metaphysical question is that there is an answer which can be rationally and logically considered and communicated with others externally. Of the logical answers there are only three possible answers to how things came to be as they are.

The first basic answer is that everything that exists has come out of absolutely nothing. That is only a theoretical answer and it is non-sensible because clearly nothing produces nothing.
The second basic answer in the area of existence is that all that now is had an impersonal beginning. Many of you know that this is the view currently taught in our schools, our universities, and the “naturalistic sciences.” So, according to this philosophy, whether we are talking about energy, mass, or motion, all that currently is can be traced back to an impersonal beginning plus time and chance. However, this “philosophy” for how things came to be has a host of very serious problems. First of all, we are forced into a form of “reductionism” when we try to account for everything that is. In other words, personality is only an illusion, because there is no evidence to suggest that impersonal materials can ever produce personality. So even though there may appear to be personality, we must reduce humans to impersonal parts plus time and chance. The appearance of diversity such as personality, design, beauty, morality, progress and even evil are all “mirages” in a worldview that begins with impersonal beginnings. If all that is comes from impersonal beginnings, then all that remains is impersonal with varying degrees of complexity, regardless of their appearance.

However, that doesn’t jive with what we can observe beginning with ourselves and the world around us. Although impersonal beginnings might account for the “unity” we observe in all things because they are all comprised of “atoms and particles,” we are still left with no answers that account for the diversity that is undeniable in the world around us. In other words, what we observe and the way that we live bear witness to the fact that some things are impersonal, but other things…specifically human beings, are personal. If you take an axe and plant it into the side of a tree, the reaction in every human society is quite different than if you were take that axe and plant into the skull of a little girl. The tree is impersonal…the human is personal. We kill hundreds of thousands of cows, chickens, and fish every day all over the world so that we can feed our families, but not one single civilization in the world would think it OK to kill hundreds of thousands of human beings and then use them as food to feed our farm animals. Cows and chickens are impersonal, people are different…people are personal. Human beings have personality, they use words, they give and receive love, they are special among all other “things” that exist in the universe. That is not my opinion, that is actually the way things are, and that is how we actually live our lives. Thus the impersonal beginnings philosophy does not provide any answers for the way things actually are.

Now, the third way to account for the metaphysical question of “being” is that everything originated from a personal beginning. This would be to say that there is an infinite, personal “god” or “gods” who created the universe as we know it, which accounts for how everything suddenly came out of nothing, and a infinite personal god would also account for the possibility of personality, should the personal “god” or “gods” impart personality to human beings. So…do we have any evidence that an infinite, personal God exists who spoke everything into existence out of nothing and then imparted His personal nature into human beings such that they would be fundamentally different than every other thing that exists in the universe? Yes, that is exactly the kind of God we find in the Bible. As we noted from scripture earlier, God created the heavens.
and the earth, and God created humans in God’s image and likeness. But wait…there’s more. Human beings are not only personal, they are communal, they are loving, and they use language. So logically, it would stand to reason that the source of community, love and language would be the infinite personal God, right? But if the infinite, personal God exists in isolation, where then would community, love, and language come from? Such a God would need His creation as much as the creation would need their God, right? But notice: an infinite, personal, TRIUNE God would account for the origin of community, love, and language—the very characteristics that set apart people from the rest of creation, and that is exactly what we see in the interaction between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The triune God experiences pure love, perfect fellowship, the use of language, and an eternal dance of joy in perfect Oneness! This is what humans were created for—we were created in God’s image and in His likeness so that we would be able to participate in and enjoy the community of joy that has existed among the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit before the beginning of time…and we’ll never feel at home until we are finally one with the triune God who created us for that very purpose.

Can you see how the infinite, personal, triune God of the Bible is the only reasonable answer to how things actually are? Schaeffer makes his case with incredible clarity and thoughtfulness, and I strongly encourage you to pick up a copy of his book, *He is There and He is Not Silent* to learn more about the reasonableness of a biblical worldview.

Listen: what you believe to be true about God is the foundation of every other part of your worldview. If you think that God does not exist and you accept that everything in existence simply evolved from impersonal beginnings, then you are living your life every day completely contrary to what you say you believe, because you treat people like they are personal, and you insist on being treated as though you are personal; however, your worldview gives no answers for how personal beings can come about from impersonal beginnings. Incongruity with what we say we believe and then the way that we actually live is maddening and exhausting.

However, if you begin with infinite, personal, triune God of the Bible, we step into a world that makes sense. In the beginning…because there was a beginning…God created the heavens and the earth. Something came out of nothing because God spoke it into existence…that’s actually how it looks according to the observations of modern science. The universe clearly had a beginning. We read in Genesis that God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” The Bible makes sense of why we are personal…why humans are beautiful, creative, and free. The Bible helps us to understand why it’s acceptable for humans to eat animals but not acceptable for humans to be fed to animals. A biblical worldview also makes sense of why humans who are personal and noble are at the same time cruel and savage.
I will circle back to this later, but let me conclude by pointing out that even though we were created in the image of God, human beings no longer reflect the image of God as we once did. There are traces of it here and there in each human life…that’s why you see some “good”…something unique and beautiful…in every human being. However, the image of God has been corrupted in all of us. We learn in Genesis 3 that human beings, made beautiful and in the image of God, used their God-given freedom to rebel against God, bringing a curse upon all human life and God’s creation…this curse is called sin. Sin corrupts, and so the Bible accounts for the nobility of humans and the cruelty of humans…and that makes sense because we see the nobility and the savagery of human beings every day…particularly when we look in the mirror, right? We’ll focus on this point later in the series, but once again, the Biblical view of God makes sense of the way things actually are.

So let me conclude with the Gospel: God created the heavens and the earth, and He did so out of love. God is love. His majesty and goodness is reflected throughout the creation so that all of us are without excuse…we know that God is there. However, we are estranged from God because the cancer of sin is in us…that was our doing…and this cancer is constantly corrupting the image of God that was given to us. Left unchecked, we will lose our humanity and become something unbearably evil for all eternity. But God so loved the world that He sent His Son, the second person of the trinity, to take on our sin and die in our place that we might be forgiven and filled with the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, so that we might be transformed from this moment on with the power of God taking residence within us…making all things new in this life and providing for a place for us at God’s table for all eternity. The Bible tells us that to be forgiven and transformed by the love of God, we must simply repent and place our faith in Jesus…the risen one, the only One who conquered death and made a way for us to be reconciled to God. I implore you…repent and place your faith in Jesus Christ. Invite the Holy Spirit to reside within you, and then allow your worldview to be shaped and informed by the truth of God’s Word as found in the scriptures. There you will find the only answers that make any sense of how things are, how they got to be this way, and what we are to do about it.

Church, let us say what we believe about God: I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And let us conclude with our scripture verse that we should all memorize and take to heart. It is Paul’s benediction upon the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 13:14): The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.