

What is God?

Does the question make you feel uncomfortable? Would you prefer it to ask: Who is God? But that would suggest that God is a person and we haven't got there yet.

Or maybe you're uncertain: is there actually a God? This may help you make up your mind.

So I shall have to decide here and now whether to refer to God as he or she rather than it. 'He' or 'she' refers to a person; 'It' suggests something that is more impersonal, maybe physical and describable, or perhaps something else – maybe not physical, or not easily describable. Therefore I'll use 'it' for the time being, until we've decided otherwise.

I make no apology here for quoting from the Bible. It has been described as God's book so it may be sensible to see what it says. As God is decidedly not physical it must be something else. The Bible says 'God is Spirit' ¹ – but what does that mean?

Do you sometimes feel that there must be more than the physical universe that we experience every day: that there must be another dimension? It does exist and it is God's dimension, and it is vast – timeless, everlasting, never-ending, infinite in size. For God to be truly God it could not be anything less.

So let's start with some descriptions of what God must be like:

- **There can only be one God.** Nothing or no one could ever claim equality with almighty God.
- **It cannot be possible to limit God in any way** – otherwise God would not be Almighty.
- Linked to that is the fact that **God can do anything** – no-one can say 'God can't do that'.

By saying that God can do anything, we are already accepting that God is able to do things. So we are forced to use the only terminology available to us and say that God has to be alive.

Not a robot or machine controlled by something

else, because the 'something else' would then be God.

To say that God is alive, and much more than just an animal, or a human, means that we have to then use terms like 'he' or 'she'. But both words imply gender, so for now I've decided to use 'He' with a capital H and we can now add to our list:

- **God is alive.**

If God is 'alive' He must have a personality. The Bible describes Him as Holy. What is that?

Probably we could start with absolute perfection, and purity, and that colours all the other ways we can describe Him.

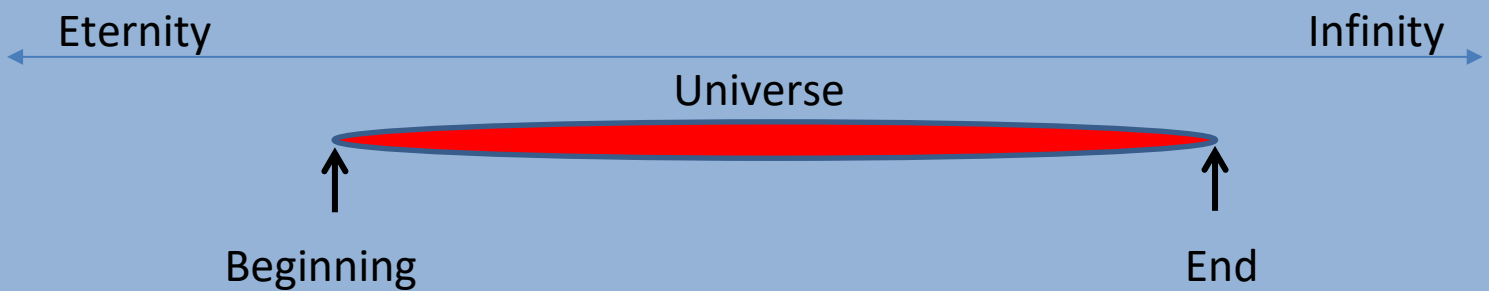
God is love – absolute perfect love, 'holy' love. God is light, 'holy' light; and so on. So adding to our list:

- **God is Holy.**
- **God is Righteous.** That means He can only ever do what is right, and good.
- **God is Creator.**

Now that will need some explanation:

The universe and everything in it had a beginning, and will ultimately have an end.

From God's perspective it might look like this:



Obviously Eternity (represented by blue) has no boundaries and so it extends far beyond our picture.

One explanation for the beginning of the universe is that one second there was nothing, then there was a big bang, and then there was all the matter needed to create the universe; billions and billions of tons of it. ²

Interestingly scientists have found that the universe then has to remain that weight ³ but there is no explanation as to where it all came from.

The Bible says that God used some of His own unlimited power. Einstein's famous equation 'E=MC²' states that mass and energy are equivalent ⁴; mass can be converted to power – as in an atom bomb, but power can also be converted to mass.

Everything we see around us is made of particles (or atoms), and they too can then be broken down into smaller and smaller parts until you are left with the fact that everything that physically exists is simply a form of energy – or power.

So if you had ultimate power you could create a physical universe.

Then, one day, you could withdraw that same power leaving nothing. ⁵

Just a thought – at the end of time for the universe, when God withdraws His power, leaving no planets, stars, interstellar dust and gasses, so that Space becomes totally empty – what and where is Space? As it is absolute nothingness does it even exist? Where was it before Creation, or the 'Big Bang'?

The Bible describes the fact that God also created all living things.

Now that has always been a source of contention: whether living things were created or whether they simply evolved. In Darwin's day you could look through a microscope at a single cell and you could imagine everything evolving from that.

Nowadays using modern powerful microscopes we can see inside a cell. But the amazing complexity of its design, including the DNA code to enable it to replicate itself, raises more questions; and even if we accept that it may have been possible to assemble all the component parts by chance, a final question remains: what is life?

We had a pear tree growing in the garden. One day in mid-summer I looked at it and it was dead. Every single component part was still there, but life had gone, and it could not be restored. So what is life and where does it come from?

At this point I think the concept of God becomes more believable so let's consider what happened next. (Again, I shall use Man to describe humankind, both male and female).

Everything God made was perfect. But God decided that for Man to be perfect he also needed to have free will. God could have made him as another species of animal that behaved the way it was designed, but Man was special.

God made Man. For now it doesn't matter whether you believe that Man evolved, or was created in the Garden of Eden; but there was a time when God spoke to the first man, who the Bible calls Adam.

God is God, and therefore it is right that he rules all he created. As Ruler he makes the rules. Some believe the Bible as it is written, others consider that the story of creation in the Bible is an allegory, but the story goes: there were many trees in the garden, with fruit designed to provide food for Adam and Eve. There were also two special trees: one was the 'Tree of Life',

the other was 'the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil'.

God said to Adam and Eve, you may eat of any tree in the garden, but you may not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – if you do, you will die.

Their response was effectively to say: 'I want to do what I want to do - I don't want to do what you want me to do' and they ate the forbidden fruit.

Disobeying God is called Sin in the Bible, and it has far-reaching consequences.

The first consequence was that with the entrance of sin into the world, it was spoilt. No longer were Adam and Eve allowed to remain in a perfect garden, now they were banished into a world where natural disasters occurred, and they would have to labour for their food.

The second consequence was that the relationship with Man and his Maker was spoilt. Adam and Eve had turned their back on God,

intent to go their own way. Sin now created a barrier between Man and God.

The third consequence was that Adam and Eve had ignored the Tree of Life, but had chosen the tree that lead to death. But worse than the natural death that eventually came to all living things, as they had chosen to live without God, so their souls would now spend eternity without him.

True life is a life lived knowing God, and when death comes to our bodies, our soul, or spirit, then continues in the presence of God. But ever since Adam, although everyone has been offered the same choice, everyone has made the same response 'I want to do what I want to do - I don't want to do what you want me to do'. Everyone has turned their back on God, living as though he doesn't matter.



Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine chapel shows God reaching down to Man, but Man just cannot be bothered to lift a finger to make contact with God.



Our problem is sin, and it is sin that keeps us apart from a holy God. However hard we may try to live a good life we are never going to approach the standard of holiness that would allow us to be in communion with God again. And sin stains: our past stays with us and we are unable to remove the sins we committed in the past.

The Bible says *everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard and the wages of sin is death.* ⁶

And that was not what God intended at all. God loves his creation, and he continues to love each person he had made, even though they have turned against him.

At this point we need to look at the concept of the Trinity. God is one God; but at the same time God is three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because our brains struggle with this concept some try to describe it as three facets of the same God. But that is not correct: each are separate, yet at the same time they are one God.

Some people try to illustrate this with water – sometimes, ice, sometimes liquid, sometimes steam, but as an illustration it is hardly perfect.

So for the time being I ask you to just accept that the Trinity exists and having considered Almighty God, we will now look at Jesus Christ, his Son.

Jesus has always existed, He is God and is spirit, but at the same time has a physical expression. John's Gospel speaks about Jesus as 'The Word of God':

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to

everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness and we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. ⁷

Why did He come to the world He had created, to live a sinless life as a human amongst those who were corrupt?

Because of our sin, we had to die. But God was prepared to accept a substitute in our place, but the substitute had to be another human, and sinless. Only Jesus could do it and because He loved us He was prepared to die in our place. The results of that were far-reaching, providing the opportunity for everyone to be saved from an eternity in Hell – spent without God.

But although this 'salvation' is available to all, it is not forced on us. We still have free will and can take it or leave it.

Holman
Hunt's
painting
'The Light
of the
World'.

Jesus said:
*'I stand at
the door
and knock.
If you hear
my voice
and open
the door, I
will come
in'*⁸



So why doesn't everyone ask Jesus for this salvation? Because in their eyes there is a catch; I'll explain:

The Bible refers to God as our father, our perfect truly loving father. When God created Man He loved him and He expected that Man would love him in return.

Sin spoilt that relationship, but that too was restored by Jesus. But if we want to accept Almighty Creator God as our father, our attitude will have to change to 'your will be done'.

God's will is Perfect, Loving, and Just, but most people still want to do what they want to do, and so they again turn their back on God and reject his offer of salvation.

However, if we want the relationship with God to be restored, if we are prepared to trust him to direct our lives, if we are prepared to be the person He created us to be, then He is prepared to live in us by his Holy Spirit. Who is that? He is the third person of the Trinity, and is best described as the spirit of Jesus.

When my mother died she left a will and various items were left to me. Suppose it were possible to say 'I bequeath my spirit' i.e. that part of her that was truly herself – and which lives on after her death.

Would I actually want her spirit in me? Would I want to take on her personality? I don't think so.

But when Jesus died he bequeathed his Spirit, and we can actually have him living in us, changing us to be more like him.

Someone described this as if we are a Company with our owners name over the door, but Jesus wants to come into partnership with us and change that to Jesus & Sons (and daughters).

But as he enters into partnership with us there will have to be some changes. Some of the items on the top shelf in our shop will have to go, so too will the under-the-counter practises we have adopted. New items will have to be stocked: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. ⁹

But don't worry – these are things that Jesus will introduce into your life as you grow with him. Some people have described this new life as being born again and it's true, we are given a new start with the stain of our past washed clean.



We will still have complete free will, but if we choose to be obedient to his leading, we will soon find that his perfect will is actually much better than ours.

We will also find that in this new relationship with Father God, we will need to somehow express our love for Him. We will also have a desire to worship Him, and that will probably mean joining with others in a church.

You may have many other questions; once you have invited Jesus into your life, you will discover that many of them have been answered for you. But if you decide not to of course, then the questions are irrelevant.

Now it's over to you. Do you want Jesus in your life?

There are no rituals to observe, you simply pray. It doesn't matter whether you direct your prayer to God, or Jesus but you have to be sincere in what you are about to do. You could pray like this:

"I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you.

Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer.

I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen." ¹⁰

If you have honestly prayed that prayer, believing that God will hear and answer you, you have now become a Christian ¹¹ and are part of God's family. To grow as a Christian it is important to tell someone what you have just done!

Find a Christian you know and tell them too – they will be able to guide you in your next steps and can probably introduce you to a church where you can meet others who have also taken this step.

It is important too that you read God's instruction manual: the Bible.

I recommend that you get a modern translation – the quotes I've used here come from the New Living Translation – and you can read it online too.

Personally if you have never really read the Bible before, I'd recommend starting with the Gospel of John. ¹²

It is also important to start praying, and establish contact with God. Some like to address their prayers to Father God, others to Jesus, but there is no formula: God hears and answers all prayers.

¹ The Bible: John 4:24

² <http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/1940Natur.145..549B>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservation_of_mass

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass%E2%80%93energy_equivalence

⁵ The Bible: Isaiah 34:4

⁶ The Bible: Romans 3:23, 6:23

⁷ The Bible: John 1:1-5, 14

⁸ The Bible: Revelation 3:20

⁹ The Bible: Galatians 5:22-23

¹⁰ <http://www.allaboutgod.com/become-a-christian.htm>

¹¹ People are called Christians when they have committed their lives to Christ Jesus.

¹² <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=NLT>

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