

# God

There are a great many views of God today: a Supreme Being, a Higher Power, "the Force," or the "Man upstairs." Some say there are many gods. Others say "we are all becoming gods"; and still others worship the devil as god.

In Paul's day there were Pantheists who believed that God does not go beyond what you see in nature. Panentheists thought all is in God and that God was the soul of the universe; and Superstitious people, who worshiped demons and the spirits of dead men as gods. Idolatry was rampant in the days of Paul, and some thought God was material.

## **God is A Person**

God is described in Scripture as one who thinks, feels, acts, loves, wills and judges. He has the emotions of a person. He can be grieved (Gen. 6:6,7), become angry (2 Thess. 1:7-9), love (1 John 4:7-11), rejoice (Luke 15:7,10), plan (Eph. 3:10,11), reason (Isa. 1:18), and do all that a person can do. When Jesus prayed, He prayed "Our Father." Christians have a relationship with God as a child to his father.

## **God is Spirit**

John 4:21-24 God is spirit, not limited by space or time

Luke 24:39 "a spirit does not have flesh and blood"

Acts 17:24-25,28-29 God is not made with hands or material. God created man; man did not invent God.

Heb. 12:9 God is the "father of our spirits," that eternal part of us that is not flesh and blood.

## **God is Self-Existent**

Acts 17:28 "for in Him we live and move and have our very being"

John 1:1-4 in Him is life (John 14:6)

Col. 1:15-17 He is the creator and sustainer of all things

Psa. 38:33:8,9 He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast

## **God is Infinite**

God does not have the limitations of men. He is not limited by space or time.

Time: 2 Pet. 3:8; Rev. 1:8; Psa. 90:2 (Eternal)

Space: Psa. 139:7-12; Prov. 15:3; Matt. 28:20 (Omnipresent)

## **God is Omniscient (All-knowing)**

God's knows and understands all things about people, nature, animals and the universe. See Psalm 147:5; Isa. 46:10; Psa. 139:1-6. The eyes of the Lord are in every place keeping watch on the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3).

## **God is Omnipotent (All-powerful)**

With God all things are possible (Mark 10:27); God can do all things (Job 40:2); and "nothing is too hard for Him" (Jer. 32:17). This would not include logical impossibilities such as a square circle or a stone so large it could not be moved.

## **God is Supremely Holy**

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:3). It is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2). God cannot be tempted nor does He tempt any man with sin (James 1:13). God commands His children, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). God's eyes are too pure to approve sin (Habakkuk 1:13; cf. Isa. 59:1,2). It is God's holiness that demands justice for sin. God is incapable of sin (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 4:15).

## **God is Impartial**

God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right (Acts 10:34,35). See also Deut. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Peter. 1:17; Rev. 20:11-15.

### **God is Sovereign Lord**

God rules the nations, plants and uproots (Acts 17:26; Jer. 18:7-10). God now commands that all men everywhere repent (Acts 17:30). God is able to destroy our souls in hell (Matt. 10:28). At the end of the world God will judge each of us according to our works and according to His Word (John 12:48; Rev. 20:11-15).

### **God is Unique**

There is but one God and there can be no other (Deut. 6:4-6). Man's whole duty in life is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). Man-made gods are forbidden because they never reflect the true grandeur and glory of the eternal God who does not live in temples made with hands (Acts 17:22-31). Man's sin problems begin when they do not acknowledge Him as God or give thanks (Rom. 1:18-32).

### **God is Unchangeable** (Immutable)

About Himself, God declares, "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6). God is not a man that He should lie or repent. "Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Num. 23:19; cf. 1 Sam. 15:29) In God there is no variation; He does not change (James 1:17).

### **God is Merciful**

Christians are to be merciful, "just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36; Matt. 5:45). Even though men were foolish and disobedient, God's kindness and love appeared in Christ Jesus. He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy (Tit. 3:3-7). God's mercy can save the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:12-16). See also Deut. 4:31; Ex. 34:6; Psa. 116:5; 145:8,9; Luke 15:11-24.

### **God is Love**

God is love, and one must know God to know love (1 John 4:7-11). We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). God demonstrated His love by giving His Son Jesus to die for our sins (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-9). See also Eph. 2:4-7; Heb. 12:6-7; 1 John 3:1.

### **God is God**

Whether men accept Him or approve of Him, He is still the one true and living God; and He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:11-13).

### **Question:**

Paul referred to the God of the Bible as "my God" (Phil. 4:19). Is He your God? Have you given your life to Him?

## **Jesus Christ**

Christianity is centered in the person of Jesus Christ, His teachings and His actions. The nature of Jesus is unlike any other person to live on this earth, for He was both God and man. He has always existed (John 1:1) and yet became a man (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-8) so that He could sacrifice Himself for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Heb. 10:8-10; 1 Pet. 1:21-25).

### **The Deity of Jesus**

- \* Matt. 1:21 "Immanuel" means "God with us"
- \* John 1:1-4 the "Word" was God (cf. 1:14,18)
- \* John 3:16 only begotten Son of God
- \* Heb. 1:1-4 Jesus is heir, creator, sustainer, and exact representation of His being
- \* Heb. 1:8,9 "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever"
- \* Phil. 2:5-8 Jesus "being in very nature God" emptied Himself
- \* Col. 1:15-20 creator, sustainer, supreme, the beginning and firstborn\*
- \* 2 Cor. 4:4 Christ, who is the image of God
- \* John 20:28 a believing Thomas said, "My Lord and my God"
- \* Rom. 1:4,5 Jesus declared with power to be the Son of God by resurrection

- \* Isa. 9:6 prophecy that Jesus would be "mighty God"
  - \* John 10:30 Jesus said, "I and the Father are one"
  - \* Matt. 16:16 "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" ("son of" partakes of same nature)
  - \* John 14:8,9 "Anyone who has seen Me, has seen the Father"
  - \* Acts 2:34-36 God made Jesus, whom you crucified, both 'Lord' and 'Christ'
  - \* Col. 2:9 in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form
  - \* Tit. 2:13 our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Pet. 1:1)
  - \* Rev. 17:14 Lord of lords, and King of kings
- Jesus was sinless: Mark 14:55,56; Luke 23:22, 47; John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:16; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22.
- Jesus performed undeniable miracles: John 3:1-3; 11:47,48; 20:30,31; Matt. 27:62-66; Acts 4:16.

### **The Humanity of Jesus**

- John 1:14 The word became "flesh" and dwelled among us
- Phil. 2:5-8 emptied Himself, being made in human likeness
- John 8:40 "you are seeking to kill me, a man who has told you the truth"
- Acts 2:22 "Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God"
- Rom. 5:15 "the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ"
- 1 Tim. 2:5 "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus"
- Matt. 4:1-10 Jesus could be tempted (cf. Heb. 2:18; 4:15; God cannot be tempted, James 1:13)
- Heb. 2:17 Jesus was made in all things like his brethren
- Characteristics of Jesus as a man:
  - hungered (Matt. 4:2; 21:18);
  - thirsted (John 19:28);
  - tired (John 4:6);
  - slept in a boat (Luke 8:24);
  - fell under the weight of the cross (Luke 23:26);
  - suffered pain (Luke 22:44).

Human emotions Jesus showed:

- sorrow (Jn. 11:33);
- compassion (Matt. 9:36);
- strong crying (Heb. 5:7);
- anger (Mark 3:5);
- love (John 21:20).

Jesus humanity supremely shown in his death: (Heb. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24) Were he not a man, Jesus could not have died.

Jesus had a human body (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14); had a true human body after his resurrection (Luke 24:39; John 20:27; 1 John 1:1-4); and has a glorified, human body in heaven (Acts 7:55,56; Matt. 26:64; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

### **The Nature of Jesus today:**

- Non-fleshly glory (1 Cor. 15:50; 2 Cor. 5:16; Psa. 24:7-10)
- King of Kings (Acts 2:29-33; Eph. 1:20-23; 1 Tim. 6:15)
- Head of the church (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18,24)
- High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16; 8:4; 10:21; 1 John 2:2)
- Preparing our eternal dwelling place (John 14:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:3-5)
- Judge (John 5:22; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 5:10)
- Glorious (Rev. 1:12-18; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2)

## **Characteristics of Jesus That Make Him Worthy to Follow:**

### **I. His Power**

The marvelous miracles of Jesus amazed people. Lazarus was raised from the dead (Jn 11); a noteworthy miracle which could not be denied. People knew the stories of the healing of blind, lame, deaf, and the demon-possessed. Jesus was powerful because God was with Him. He walked on water, stilled the storms, turned water to wine, and withered the fig tree. He was Lord over nature. He fed the multitude, healed every sick person, caused a great load of fishes. He was Lord over life. He cast out demons and raised the dead. He was Lord over the underworld

### **His Compassion**

One of the greatest beauties of Jesus is that he understands the needs and pains of men. Every person is important to Him. In our world we tend to rank people's importance by their position. Jesus never did that. Children, slaves, women, and foreigners were important. The sick, the afflicted, and the downtrodden were important. Jesus did not work miracles to build himself up in the eyes of the world but were acts of compassion.

### **His Humanity**

We can identify with Jesus, and Jesus was One who can identify with us! Jesus, when He became a man, took to Himself all the weaknesses of mankind:

- physical vulnerability: hunger, thirst, sleep, suffer pain
- emotional vulnerability: betrayed, lied about, rejected, grieve
- spiritual vulnerability: prayed, could be tempted,

Heb. 4:15,16 says: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

### **His Honesty**

Many demand that people be real or genuine, and they despise pretense. Jesus never taught anything that he himself did not live up to. Jesus never taught anything he had to take it back. In a world of pretenders, Jesus taught against pretentious religionists (Matt. 6:1-18). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matt. 23:25-28). He embodied truth (Jn 14:6; 18:37).

### **His Courage**

In a world that liked to side-step immorality, Jesus spoke out against the real evils of our world--those that come from the heart: anger, hatred, selfishness, adultery, lust, corruption in high places, greed, and false swearing. Jesus did indeed cleanse the temple, to restore it to what God intended for it to be (Mk 11:15-17). Jesus did not compromise about truth; He was not a "mush God." He taught the difference between a narrow and a broad way (Matt. 7:13, 14). Jesus had more to say about hell than any other person in Scripture. (All but one reference to hell is from the lips of Jesus). If there is no hell, Jesus is a liar; but if there is a hell, Jesus would be no friend if he did not warn us of its presence.

### **His Promises**

Jesus promised to care for our physical needs (Matt. 6:33); to care for our emotional needs (Matt. 11:28-30); and to care for our spiritual needs (John 14:1-3).

### **His Uniqueness**

Jesus was unlike any other person to live throughout all history. The great prophets before Him pointed to Him, and all history since that time dates from His birth. The greatest truth of the

Old Testament is that man was created in God's likeness; and the greatest truth of the New Testament is that God became man's likeness. He is:

- to have first place in everything (Col. 1:16,17)
- both God and man (John 1:1-3, 14)
- only one by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; 1 Cor. 3:11)
- "One Lord" (Eph. 4:5)
- the first to be raised to die no more (Rom. 6:9)

## The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit goes by several different names: the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Truth. The Scriptures consider the Holy Spirit as a person, a spirit, and Divine. The Holy Spirit should never be considered as some kind of "force" or influence, as if he had no personality. In the section on the Trinity is a list of passages, which show that the Holy Spirit is mentioned as one of the three persons of the Godhead (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Acts 15:28).

### **The Holy Spirit is a Person**

- He speaks (1 Tim. 4:1)
- He witnesses (John 15:26)
- He teaches (John 14:26)
- He guides (John 16:13; Acts 16:6-10)
- He possesses a mind (Rom. 8:27)
- He has knowledge (1 Cor. 2:11)
- He has affections (Rom. 15:30)
- He possesses a will (1 Cor. 12:11)
- He can be grieved (Eph. 4:30; Isa. 63:10)
- He can be resisted (Acts 5:3)

### **The Holy Spirit is God, is Divine**

- eternal (Heb. 9:14)
- omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-10)
- omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10,11; Rom. 8:26,27; cf. Isa.40:13,14)
- omnipotent (Micah 2:6; 3:8; cf. Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20)
- Holy (100 times in Bible)
- has foreknowledge (Acts 1:16; 11:27,28)
- Sovereign (2 Cor. 3:17,18; Rev. 2:7)
- creator (Gen. 1:2; Psa. 33:6; 104:30)
- regenerator (2 Cor. 3:6; Tit. 3:5; Rom. 15:16)
- able to resurrect (Rom. 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18,19)

### **The Holy Spirit Inspired the Word**

1. The writers of the Old Testament claimed to be spokesmen for God, empowered by the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2; Isa. 59:21; Ezek. 11:5).

2. Jesus and the apostles agree with this claim, that the Spirit was involved in the writing of the Old Testament (Matt. 22:42-46; Mark 12:35-37; Acts 1:16; 18:25; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

3. Jesus promised Divine guidance and teaching to His apostles concerning themselves and the things that they would teach (John 14:26; 16:12,13; Matt. 10:19,20).

4. The apostles and prophets of the New Testament repeatedly claimed that they were

speaking and writing the eternal truth of God through the Holy Spirit which was given to them (1 Cor. 2:6-13; Eph. 3:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:16-21). Paul calls the Word of God the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

### **The Apostles and Others Received Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit**

Jesus promised the apostles that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts. 1:8). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled them and they began to speak with other tongues (foreign languages which they had not learned), as the Spirit was giving them utterance (Acts 2:1-12). The apostles by means of the Spirit were also able to work miraculous signs and wonders through the power of the Spirit (Acts 2:43; cf. Heb. 2:3,4) so that the people had a great sense of awe.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 Paul lists nine miraculous spiritual gifts that come from the Holy Spirit: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, (miraculous) faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongue speaking, and interpretation of tongues. The Holy Spirit gave these gifts "just as He wills" (12:11), and not everyone possessed miraculous gifts (12:27-31). For further study of miraculous gifts, see the section "Does Anyone Have Miraculous Gifts Today?"

### **The Holy Spirit Indwells the Christian**

Peter promised those who were baptized that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). This was a non-miraculous gift. This promise was not merely for them, Peter and the apostles remarked that God has given the Holy Spirit to all who obey Him (Acts 2:39; 5:32). That the Holy Spirit dwells within the Christian cannot be doubted. Paul said that our bodies are "the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

God has sealed each Christian in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise. The Spirit has been given as a pledge (earnest or guarantee) of our inheritance, with a view to our redemption as God's own possession (Eph. 1:13,14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22). This sealing took place when the Christians at Ephesus obeyed the message of truth--the gospel of your salvation. The Holy Spirit has been sent into the hearts of Christians because they are sons of God to assure them of their adoption as sons; and this Spirit cries, "Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:5,6). The "Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

Paul told the church at Rome, "However you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him . . . But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you" (Rom. 8:9,11).

We are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3:16). The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given us (Rom. 5:5). Christians are to be filled with the Spirit by speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in the hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:18,19). When Christians are led by the Spirit (through the Word of God), they will manifest in their lives the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:16-23; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

## **The Trinity**

The word "trinity" is not found in the Bible but is certainly a Biblical concept. The word refers to the concept that God is one in essence or substance and three in person. God is one but

is known as Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Scriptures teach clearly that God is one and there is no other:

- Deut. 6:4 "the Lord our God is one Lord"
- Mark 12:29 "the Lord our God, the Lord is one"
- Deut. 4:35,36 "the Lord is God; there is none else besides him"
- Isa. 43:10,11 "before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I even I, am Jehovah, and there is no savior."
- Isa. 44:6 "I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God."
- Isa. 45:5 "I am God, and there is none else; besides me there is no God."
- 1 Cor. 8:4,6 "there is no God but one. . .yet to us there is one God."
- Rom. 3:30 "God is one."

*Yet we have just as positive teaching that the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.*

<b>Father</b>	<b>Son</b>	<b>Holy Spirit</b>
1 Cor. 8:6	Rom. 9:5	Acts 5:3,4
Gal. 1:1	Col. 2:9	Matt. 28:19
John 6:27	John 20:28	2 Cor. 13:14
Phil. 2:11	John 10:30	2 Cor. 3:17,18
John 20:17	John 1:1,18	1 Cor. 2:10-13
Mark 14:36	Phil. 2:6	Rom.
8:9,11		
John 11:41	1 John 5:20	

We are not saying that one God is three Gods; we are saying that there is but one infinite Spirit Being, but within that one Spirit essence there are three personal distinctions, each of which may be, and is called God. Each is capable of loving and being loved by the others (John 14:31). Each has a distinct part to play in the creation of the universe, and in the creation and salvation of mankind.

The Scriptures speak of God as a united one as in the case of Gen. 2:24 where a man and a woman are said to become "one flesh" or in Ex. 26:6,11 where many pieces are put together so that the tabernacle may be one. This same word is used to describe God in Deut. 6:4,5 where the Bible says, "the Lord our God is one Lord." This is a united one. Three persons united into one God.

In Matt. 3:16,17 while Jesus was being baptized into the Jordan River, the Father spoke from heaven; and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. We are compelled to distinguish each of these persons. In John 15:26 Jesus said, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth."

Again we clearly see distinctions between the persons of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Other passages which show this distinction: Matt. 28:19; Acts 7:55; Rom. 11:36; 8:11; Eph. 2:18,21,22; Gal. 4:6; Heb. 9:14; and Jude 20,21. Eph. 4:4-6 makes it clear that there is one God and Father, one Lord, and one Spirit.

These Divine Three are equal. This does not mean we cannot arrange them with the Father first, the Son second, and the Spirit third. This is not a difference in glory, power, or length of existence, but simply one of order.

The idea of three in one is somewhat mysterious. One might find analogies helpful to understand how three things can be of the same substance but different. H<sub>2</sub>O is the same in substance whether it is solid, liquid or gas in form. Yet ice, water and steam are different in temperature and in function. We might think of an apple. The same genetic makeup of an apple is in the tree, the fruit and the seed. Each has its own distinction and function, yet all may be truly regarded as "apple."

Note: For more information see Roy H. Lanier, *The Timeless Trinity*, pp. 45-59. This source provided much help for this section.

## **Making God in Our Image**

### **Exodus 20:4-6**

Idols are the means by which we can make God in our image, to do our bidding. Rom. 1:20-26 tells us that when men don't appreciate God for who He is, serve the wrong God, they begin to live the wrong way. Wrong belief leads to wrong living.

#### **Why Would Anyone Worship an Idol?**

An idol is worshipped not for its shape but for its imagined power. One can own an idol, whereas one cannot own God. I can control my idol, whereas I cannot control God. People make idols for themselves, for their own benefit. An idol is personal, whereas God is everyone's God; my idol loves me but it doesn't love you; it answers my prayers but not yours. To own an idol was to own an image of a "god." In ancient times people would bathe, dress, and feed their idols. They felt they could by this means manipulate their god to their own interests.

#### **What is Wrong with Idolatry?**

Idols are not just harmless, inanimate objects. What harm can they do? A gun is also an inanimate object, but look what men can do with it! God is spirit (John 4:24) and not physical. Idols start with a mental picture and later become metal. Idolatry poses limits on the nature of God, but God cannot be limited or confined to the physical. Solomon, awestruck over the magnificence of the temple of God prayed: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27) Instead of accepting himself as a man made in God's image, the idolater tries to remake God in his own image." He brings God down to a comfortable size! Idolaters destroy reality, the God of the Scripture, and make one that they prefer. Isaiah asks, "is there anything like God?" (Isa. 40:18-20) Habakkuk asks, "What value is an idol?" (Habakkuk 2:18-20) When they are worshipped, things become more important than the Person of God! All that God reveals to us was designed to make an impact on us and to improve our minds and hearts. Idolatry turns the focus of our relationship away from God to a "thing." God is jealous and demands first place. (Jealous: "a zealousness for what is right, an utter, total, burning, consuming commitment to hold on to that which is right.") God is jealous with a holy jealousy--for that which rightfully belongs to Him exclusively (Isa. 42:8). Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15) We all might ask ourselves that same question about covetousness (Col. 3:5), our jobs, alcohol, television, computer, sex, or money (Luke 12:15f.). Good things can become overly important to us (Luke 14:33). The real horror of idols is that they not only give us nothing; they take away even that which we possess! We think we control them; they end up controlling us (1 Cor 6:12)! Money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). Can you imagine waking up in eternity and finding out that all the time what you worshipped couldn't do you any good?

What kind of God do you have? What controls your life?



## Does God Want Men to Worship with Images or Icons?

### **What is an Icon?**

An icon is an image of Jesus Christ, a holy person, or the cross in picture or sculpture form. Icons are used in prayer in the belief that God is too busy to hear our prayers, but the being in the icon is not too busy. The being represented by the icon will then relay our prayers to God.

Members of the Russian Orthodox Church are permitted to pray only when the priest reads a prayer in the worship services. They have not been trained in how to pray to God on their own. Consequently, they often pray to icons.

### **May Christians Worship with Icons?**

1. *The Ten Commandments forbade the use of graven images:* "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them to worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God," (Ex. 20:4,5; Deut. 5:8-10).
2. *The Nature of God argues against it.* God is a spirit (John 4:24), and those who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Paul said to the men of Athens: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.... Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man's design and skill" (Acts 17:24,25,29).
3. *There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tim. 2:5). There is, for this reason, no need for an icon. Our access to the Father is through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:18). Christians themselves are God's dwelling place in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:19-22).
4. *God is never too busy to hear our prayers.* In Luke 18:1-8, God is contrasted with the pestered, unjust judge in that He will listen to our prayers. God invites His children to ask, seek and knock; and He promises us that we will be given, will find, and will be answered (Matt. 7:7-11). God does not grow weary or tired (Isa. 40:28).
5. *The Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses.* When we do not know how to pray as we ought, we have the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us in accordance with God's will (Rom. 8:26,27). Christians do not need man-made icons to do what the Holy Spirit is already doing for us.