

**GRACE BIBLE TRAINING CENTRE (GBTC)**  
**SCHOOL OF MINISTRY**  
**ARUSHA - TANZANIA**

**SUBJECT:** BASIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

**LESSON 1:** THE SOVEREIGN GOD & HIS NATURAL QUALITIES

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**Introduction:-**

This course is an introductory systematic study of basic Bible doctrine and its application in the life of the believer. Major topics include the nature of God, the acts of God, the activities and limitations of angels, the creation, and the fall of man, God's redemptive plan, the origin of the scriptures, the church, and God's ultimate plan for mankind.

**What is doctrine?**

It is an accepted body of beliefs or teachings of the Church as based on the Holy Bible (*2Timothy 3:10, 16; John 7:15-17*). The doctrine of the Church is one and this is why it is written in singular form and not plural.

There are several other doctrines not accepted by the Church but peddled by false teachers, false prophets, sects and cults. The Early Church apostles warned against these doctrines (*2Timothy 4:3-4; Colossians 2:20-23; 1Timothy 4:1-2; Hebrews 13:9; Ephesians 4:14*).

**1.0 - The Sovereign God**

**1.1 - God: His Nature & Natural Characteristics**

In our efforts to understand God, the finite man cannot comprehend the Infinite God (*Job 11:7*).

We can only have some knowledge of God as He reveals Himself in His nature and characteristics (*Romans 1:20; Deuteronomy 29:29*).

What He has revealed of Himself is an accurate but partial disclosure of His divine Being (*1Corinthians 13:12*).

We also know God as He enters into relationships with us.

The progressive self-revelation of God through the ages reaches its fullness in His Son, Jesus Christ (*Hebrews 1:2*).

### 1.1.1 - God's Nature

#### (a) God is a Personal Being

A person is something other than a body.

A person is one who has the capacity to think, to feel and to decide.

Although God has no body, He certainly has intelligence and the ability to think, feel and reason.

God communicates with people (*Psalms 25:14*).

He is affected by their response to Him (*Isaiah 1:14*)

He thinks (*Isaiah 55:8*)

He makes decisions (*Genesis 2:18*)

Therefore, God is a personal Being.

#### (b) God is Spirit

God has no form whatsoever because He is Spirit (*John 4:24*)

A spirit is invisible (*John 1:18*)

The quality of God as a Spirit may be defined as follows:-

(i) God has a unique, substantial being which is distinct from the world (*Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15-17*). His attributes, which make up His nature are the basis of all His outward manifestations.

(ii) God is invisible, immaterial and is composed of no parts (*1Timothy 1:17*). He is not a natural substance as we are, but a spiritual substance (*Luke 24:39; 1Timothy 6:15-16*). Since God is a spirit in the purest sense of the word, He does not have the limitations of a human being.

In Exodus 33:19-23, it is said that Moses saw God. What he saw was the reflections of God's glory and not His essence.

God can also reveal Himself through a physical manifestation (*John 1:32-34*)

The Bible also speaks of God's hands, feet, ear, mouth, nose or face. This actually indicates that God is doing something a human being would do. (*Psalms 98; 99:5; 91:4; 34:15*).

These figurative language or symbols help us in understanding the unknown from the known.

#### (c) God is One

When we say that God is One, we are referring to

- (i) the numerical unity of God
- (ii) the uniqueness of God
- (iii) the simplicity of God

(i) The Numerical unity of God

There is only One Divine Being (*1Corinthians 8:6; 1Kings 8:60; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39*)

This should not be confused with the Trinity, which would be treated later.

(ii) The Uniqueness of God

God is unique in that He is the only One (*Deuteronomy 6:4; Exodus 15:11*).

He is the only One to be called Jehovah (*Zechariah 14:9*)

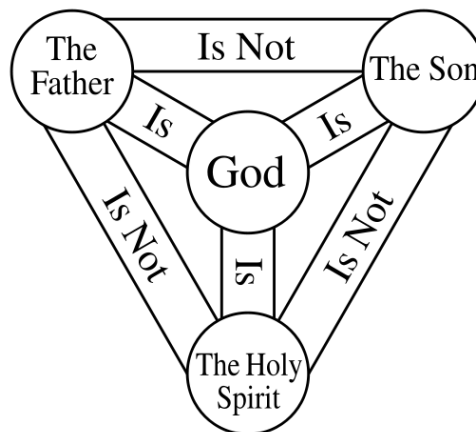
He is the Sovereign ruler of the universe, and besides Him there is no other God.

Other passages are *Genesis 17:1; Exodus 20:2-3, 23; Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6, 8; 45:5*,

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God is self-existent, which means that eternal existence is part of His very nature. He has no beginning and no end.

(d) God is Triune



(Further Readings: *Matthew 28:18-19; 3:16-17; Luke 3:22; Mark 1:10-11; Acts 7:55; 2Corinthians 13:14; Deuteronomy 6:4*)

God is Spirit, is personal, is one, and is triune.

The words triune and trinity contain the concepts of oneness or three-in-one.

The one Divine Being is tri-personal or a Trinity.

In Him, there are three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is difficult to describe the Trinity.

Each person in the Trinity is known by different qualities, which are distinctive.

These personal properties or qualities express the relationship of each to the others.

Each in Himself expresses the Divine essence.

There are three persons in the Godhead:- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

They are of the same substance:- equal in glory, power, majesty and eternity; and they are one.

While distinct in their relations with one another, they are one in all else. The whole work of creation and grace is a single operation common to all three divine persons, who at the same time operate according to their unique properties, so that all things are from the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

The word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible, but the doctrine of Trinity is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, one of the names of God Elohim, is in plural form e.g. *Genesis 1:26; Psalms 45:6-7, Hebrews 1:8-9; Isaiah 48:16; 63:8-10.*

This points to personal distinctions in God, and to a plurality of persons in the Godhead.

In the New Testament,

- (i) God sent His Son into the world (*John 3:16; Galatians 4:4; 1John 4:9*)
- (ii) The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit (*John 14:26, 15:26; 16:7*)
- (iii) The Father speaks to the Son (*Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22*)
- (iv) The Son communes with the Father (*Matthew 11:25-26; John 11:41; 12:27-28*)
- (v) The Holy Spirit prays to God in the hearts of believers (*Romans 8:26-27*)
- (vi) At other occasions, all three persons are mentioned e.g. *Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; 1Corinthians 12:4-6, 2Corinthians 13:14; 1Peter 1:2.*

It is difficult to understand the teaching of Trinity because in human experience nothing can be compared to 'trinity in unity' and 'unity in trinity'.

The mystery of the Trinity is difficult to comprehend in our finite or limited existence. We can only understand Trinity to the degree that God has revealed in His Word (1Corinthians 13:12).

#### (e) God is Eternal

God has no beginning and has always existed. That's why He is eternal.

The creation of heaven and earth was not the beginning of eternity neither was it when angels were created.

Eternity is an infinite (unlimited) timelessness. It is God's infinity in relation to time. Men and angels are created beings, but God alone is without beginning. Thus, He is the only inhabitant of eternity.

God is eternal in 2 ways:-

- (i) He never began to be; He always was (*Psalms 90:2*);
- (ii) His existence will never end (*Deuteronomy 32:40; Psalms 102:27*).

The eternity of God is revealed in scripture (*Genesis 21:33; Psalms 90:2; 102:27; Isaiah 57:15; 1Timothy 6:16*).

(f) God is Immutable (Unchanging)

Human beings have faults that need to be changed or corrected, but God does not. He is perfect in every respect (*Isaiah 46:9-10; Psalms 33:11; 119:160; 103:17; Malachi 3:6*).

Certain principles about the unchanging nature of God are:-

- (i) Since God is infinite, self-existent and independent, He is above all the causes and possibilities of change;
- (ii) God can neither increase nor decrease and He is not subject to further development;
- (iii) God's power can never become greater or less, and He can never be wiser or holier;
- (iv) God cannot be more righteous, merciful, and loving than He has ever been or ever will be;
- (v) He cannot change in His relation to people. He operates according to eternal principles that do not vary with the change of day.

Since God is unchangeable, we can commit ourselves completely to Him as we rely on His word (*Romans 8:28*).

God does change His mind over sin (see *1Samuel 15:11, 29; Numbers 23:19; Jonah 3:9-10*). This attitude of God does not refer to any fundamental change in His character or purpose. He always hates sin and always loves the sinner.

### **1.1.2. - God's Natural Attributes**

(Further Readings: *Job 38 – 41; Psalms 139; 145:3; Romans 11:33-35*)

We have studied God's nature but we need to know also His characteristics, which are His attributes.

God's attributes are the qualities which are associated with or which describe Him.

His attributes explain why He acts as He does.

His attributes include omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience and wisdom.

(a) The Omnipotence of God

His omnipotence implies that God is almighty or all-powerful (*Jeremiah 32:17, 27*)

This absolute power can be seen in creation (*Genesis 1:1*); sustaining all things by His powerful word (*Hebrews 1:3*); the redemption of people (*Luke 1:35, 37*); miracles (*Luke 9:43*); the salvation of sinners (*1Corinthians 2:5; 2Corinthians 4:7*); and the completion of His purpose for His kingdom (*1Peter 1:5*).

(b) The Omnipresence of God

God is everywhere present at all times (*Psalms 139:1-10*)

The knowledge that God is always present helps us to have courage in trials because we know that God is there to strengthen and guide us.

It also serves to remind us to be very careful in how we live because God sees everything that we do, whether good or bad.

Regardless of how we feel, God is with us.

Whether we can feel God's presence or not He is everywhere.

(c) The Omniscience of God

God knows and sees everything (*Psalms 139:11-12*).

He has unlimited awareness.

He knows all that is actual and all that is possible.

Because God knows all things, He is able to tell ahead of time what is going to happen in the future, as in prophetic predictions (*Isaiah 46:9-10*).

This does not mean that God makes the decisions about what is going to happen to us. He simply knows what our decisions will be before we make them.

Since He foresees, He can foretell. This does not mean He predetermined, or decided in advance what would take place.

The fact that God knows all things should strengthen our faith when we are in the middle of severe trial. He knows the cause of our problems and what would happen with each of the solutions we might consider.

(d) The wisdom of God - (He is All-Wise)

(Further Readings: *Isaiah 40:13-14; Romans 11:33-35*)

Wisdom is not the same as knowledge.

Wisdom searches through knowledge to find the highest purpose possible and then uses the best way to accomplish it.

Since God is all-wise, He does all things well.

God's wisdom can be seen through His creation (*Psalms 104:24-30; Jeremiah 10:12*)

His wisdom is available to us when we need it (*James 1:5*).

## **1.2 - God: His moral characteristics and works**

### **1.2.1 - God's Moral characteristics**

God's moral characteristics are those that are revealed in God's dealings with men and women.

They include the holiness of God and the love of God.

#### **(a) The Holiness of God**

God has always wanted to be known among the nations as the 'Holy One' (Ezekiel 39:7)

Because of God's holiness, it is impossible for Him to make moral mistakes.

Holiness is a characteristic of God which expresses the perfection of all He is, and the basis for all His actions.

Holiness contains the idea of separation. The perfect Divine Being is separated from and exalted above sinful people and evil.

Even though God is holy, He still maintains a close relationship with us.

Included in God's holiness is love for what is good and hatred of what is evil.

God's separation from people is because of human sinfulness (Exodus 19:12-13, 21-25)

His separation from the people is also symbolized by the building of the Tent, or Tabernacle in the desert, and enclosing the most Holy Place with curtains (Exodus 26:33).

Only a sanctified High Priest is allowed into the Most Holy Place once a year to sprinkle blood in the mercy seat, to make atonement for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16).

This exclusion of God from people was to emphasize to people how much God hates sin.

Sin separates God from sinful people, and sinful people from God. (Isaiah 59:2; Habakkuk 1:13; Job 40:3-5; Isaiah 6:5-7).

We have no direct access to God by our own efforts except by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:2, Ephesians 2: 13-18; 1Peter 3:18)

God's righteousness and justice is a direct result of His holiness.

His holiness is expressed by righteousness and by justice.

God's righteousness is demonstrated by His love of holiness in people. As a holy God, He requires that His people be holy (Hebrews 12:10, 14; Ephesians 1:4; 1Peter 1:13-16)

His justice is demonstrated by His judgement of sin. He cannot tolerate sin and thus punishes those who sin.

Holiness as a quality of the Christian life is more than not doing what is wrong but also doing what is right (Luke 10:29-37)

(b) The Love of God

God shows His love to us not only in words and promises but also by what He does. There is nothing we can do or say to merit His love. It is part of His nature to love.

His love for us can be demonstrated in practical ways such as His goodness, mercy, patience, faithfulness etc. (John 3:16; 17:24; 1John 4:4-10; Revelations 1:4-5)

God loves people so much that at times He holds back punishment even when He had planned to punish. This is an aspect of His mercy (Ezekiel 22:30)

God's love is demonstrated in the sense that He is a merciful Father (Psalms 103:13-14; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 31:7-9)

God provided our salvation at immeasurable cost, that is the death of Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17).

His love delivers us from fear and its torments (1John 4:18; 2Timothy 1:17).

God's love can be demonstrated in His judgement of sin by hardships in order to get our attention and restore us back to fellowship with Him (Ezekiel 18:1-32).