

Putting God First Study

Lesson 1: God is First

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Introduction: The following lesson is intended as a reminder to students of God’s “firstness”. We often forget the magnitude of the concept that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is greater than us. First implies the possibility of a second or third. It is a word which signals a series or an order or greater to lesser. Unfortunately, this manner of thinking about God sets mankind up for a view of God that is far beneath the majesty He deserves. When we think of God in the sense of comparison to something else, we are suggesting the potential for someone or something to have a level of equality with God. Scripture alludes to this false thinking. For example, Exodus 15:11 asks the question: ¹¹ **Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?** In the subsequent verses, the reader comes to understand that the answer is *no one*, AND the question is a foolish question.

As followers of the one true God, we should at all times realize the folly of creating comparisons to God. Granted, our minds work in such a way that we benefit from seeing order and structure. Far and near. Big and small. Hot and cold. Each of these comparisons helps us to make sense of our world. We must be careful to not limit God to our mental structures. We must see God as He really is which is First and only rather than first among a group. This lesson will sensitize our minds to the truth that God is singular, incomparable, and unique. Nothing else is like Him. Enjoy the lesson!



Key Verses: Genesis 1:1, Revelations 1:17-18, 1 Corinthians 15:20-22.

I. Understanding First—Genesis 1:1

Moses, the writer of Genesis begins with a very interesting statement that has been minimized by many Christians. We quote Genesis 1:1 but fail to understand the broad meaning of what was written. The scripture starts “In the beginning”. What students should at some point ask is what about before the beginning? This leads to a theological concept *pre-existent*. The term means to exist before. In short, this means that God has and will always exist. He is (not was) always existing. He does

not exist within our time structures. He has not been created, He simply is. Remember, we understand time-based on the Earth's rotation around the sun and based on the Earth's rotation on its axis during a 24-hour period. Before there was a sun, which allows us to track time, God is. Thus, a clearer understanding of Genesis 1: 1 might read, "When God decided He wanted to have a beginning, He said let there be light." Prior to this beginning there was no concept of time as we consider it. (Every wonder why we are reminded in scripture "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." 2 Peter 3:8).



VS.



The way we think of God

First= Position

The way we ought to think of God

First= One and only whether we acknowledge or not

This concept of God always existing means that nothing is outside of Him or before Him. He is First because He can only be First. First in everything means He never changes position because he cannot. What changes is our understanding and our acknowledgment of Him in His eternal position. This is why comparing God to other created objects makes no sense. Additionally, to have an idol, which is made up of something that God created is humorous. How can we, who are created, use something that is created to stand for a god. God helps our understanding when He says:

Genesis 20:3-4

³Thou shalt have no other gods before me.⁴Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

This is not only a command, but it is an impossibility because God is and always has been first and only. Not first among many. Nor is He first in line. He exists first and speaks everything into existence.

- What impact does it have on your thinking when you consider that nothing is beyond the boundaries of God?
- Since God exists before everything, and created everything, why do we worry so much about things He controls?

II. Framing the Extent of First—Revelation 1:17-18

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

The writer, John, had an experience with The Lord and was told to write down what he heard. The book of Revelation is what he was told to write. In chapter 1 we read that he was initially confused and afraid of the vision he was having but in verse 17-18, Jesus Christ identifies himself as the speaker. Students will notice the language used as the identifier. “John, do not be afraid. The one you hear and are experiencing right now is the one who is the FIRST and the LAST.” Verse 18 clarifies the identity of the speaker as Son of God (the resurrected Christ) and identifies His function (I have the keys of salvation). Death and Hades imply punishment of sins for eternity.

Jesus shows us that first is not only a beginning but it also indicates there is nothing beyond on the end of things. In other words, there is nothing before or beyond (after) God. By framing what it means to be First and Last, Jesus indicates to John the other part of what it means to be First and only. Not only is God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) the beginning, He is also the author of Ending or of Completion.

Jesus tells John what is to come in history. A close reading of Revelation indicates to us how the work of God the Son (Jesus Christ) will be completed. The issue has little to do with time and dates. The issue of completion has to do with the work of Jesus Christ in and through His people as He completes the process of “crushing the head of the serpent” (Genesis 3:15). A great way to think of this is to

think of God as the beginner and the finisher of everything. Thus, we can see and understand Him as completing work that was begun when He said, “Let there be...”.

Last has numerous implications connected to our understanding of First. Last also has an implication of order, rank, and even the ending portion of a legal document. Jesus Christ also connects the term with the phrase “I Am”. I Am the first and I am the last. By doing this, He is helping us to understand the totality of Himself as God. The phrase I AM is the same phrase used in Exodus 3:13-14, when Moses was sent to Pharaoh to free the Israelite slaves from Egypt.

Exodus 3:13-14

¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.^[a] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Also, this phrase is used when Jesus describes Himself during His Earthly ministry such as in John 6:35 (I Am the Bread of Life) or John 14:6 (I Am the way, the truth, and the life). These and other I AM statements were used as indicators that Jesus was and is God. Therefore, as Jesus indicated who is speaking he frames Himself with authority as God. I am the one who was dead. I am the one with the keys to death and Hades. I am the bread of life. I am... All of these are one and the same. There is no one before me (I AM the first) and there is no one after me (I AM the last).

This picture of everything being contained within the scope, understanding, and power of God sets the foundation for our understanding of who we are in Christ. Consider the following:

- If you are self-made and self-sufficient then why do you need help during difficult moments?
- If you are the source of everything in your life, did you arrive where you are now on your own? If not, then how are you the source?



In the next few lessons, we will come to realize that God's expectations of us relate to Him being First overall and being first in our lives. As First, God has the right and the authority to demand anything and we have no right to deny His request!