

We Believe
We Believe that God is the Only One True God
Psalm 100

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Text Introduction: Our church, as you well know, has many interesting architectural features. One of my favorite features is how the original front door, pillars, and steeple from the church that burned were incorporated into this new building. Though magnificent in their appearance, the pillars out in the front lobby serve no purpose other than to remind us of the past. That is, they offer no structural support in that they do not rise to the ceiling. I tell you that today because we are surrounded by invisible pillars today. Paul, in writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15 described the church as the “pillar and ground (or foundation) of truth.” Now, understand that there are some foundational pillars—pillars that if you take them away, the whole structure is going to fall apart. There are some other pillars that are important from a feelings standpoint and/or a preference standpoint, but not foundational. So, here we are today surrounded by pillars. Some of the pillars are going to be different in the 9:45 service and eleven:11 service. These are the kind of pillars that don’t reach the ceiling. You cannot build a church on these kinds of pillars. You might can enhance ministry, but you cannot build a church on these kinds of pillars. Once again, on the other hand, there are some pillars that are foundational. Again, if you take them away, the whole structure is going to fall down in ruins. So, for the next ten weeks, as we begin a new journey as the members of First Baptist Church, I want us to remind ourselves of those foundational pillars of our faith—historical, orthodox, Biblical beliefs. You either hold on to them or you cannot call yourself a Christian as an individual or a church as a group.

Now, before we begin, I probably ought to make several important introductory statements:

1. I hope you understand that every time I stand here to preach, I declare that which we believe and that which the Bible says. However, for this series, we are trying to define those essentials that define us as Christians.
2. I am not sure that my list is complete. I have prayed about this list, I have consulted the great systematic theological books of our time, and I have asked a few close friends to help me make sure that I am not missing the obvious.
3. This is the most important thing. Each of these next 10 weeks could be an entire study. It is absurd for us to think that we can uncover all the mysteries of these topics in a singular sermon. (The good news is that we have the rest of our lives to continue to dialogue about these matters.)

Today, we begin with God. I want to chuckle even as I say that. Where do you begin to talk about God? Well, I want to point us to Psalm 100.

Text: ¹ Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!

² Serve the LORD with gladness;

Come before His presence with singing.

³ Know that the LORD, He *is* God;

*It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

⁴ Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name.

⁵ For the LORD *is* good;
His mercy *is* everlasting,
And His truth *endures* to all generations.

Sermon Introduction: One of modern day's chief critics of God and Christianity is a man by the name of Sam Harris. He wrote a book in 2006 entitled, *Letters to a Christian Nation*. In Harris' own words, he says that his aim is "to demolish the intellectual and moral pretensions of Christianity in its most committed forms."¹ In other words, he thinks that you are ignorant if you believe in God and is out to prove just that. In his book, he speaks of the losses to the city of New Orleans suffered at the hands of Katrina. He offers this as an argument against God's very existence:

But what was God doing while Katrina laid waste to their city? Surely he heard the prayers of those elderly men and women who fled the rising waters for the safety of their attics, only to be slowly drowned there. These were people of faith. These were good men and women who had prayed throughout their lives. Do you have the courage to admit the obvious? These poor people died talking to an imaginary friend.²

Harris is using an old atheist philosophical response that goes something like this: God is either not God or He is not good, but He cannot be both. These critics of God or skeptics of God say that He cannot be completely God and not stop evil. If He is capable of stopping evil and does not, He cannot possibly be good. How do you answer people like Sam Harris? What do we believe?

As I have already said, there is much that we can say, it seems to me that the place to start is with this statement: We believe that God is the only one true God. This is said over and over again in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 6:4, one of the most important texts in the whole Bible, we read: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" This is the statement about God that they were to believe, memorize, and apply in every area of their life. And so must we.

Psalm 100 helps us to identify that truth and decide what we do with a truth like that.

The Character of God

The Psalmist declared something about the character of God in Psalm 100. In fact, the Psalmist declared precisely what atheists have argued against for centuries. Did you catch that? He declared that God is God and that God is good.

God is God—What does it exactly mean that God is God? Well, you have heard that God knows all things (omniscient), is everywhere (omni-present) and all-powerful (omnipotent). All of these attributes are recorded over and over again in Scripture.

¹ Wikipedia.

² Chuck Colson, *The Faith Given Once, for All: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why It Matters*, Zondervan, 2008, p. 31.

In this text, the Psalmist seems to point to things that are meant by the statement “God is God.” God is first of all the creator and then He is eternal. He is the beginning of all things and He is the ending of all things. In addition to creator, He is in control. The Psalmist referred to Him as a shepherd. But how do you address that question of bad things happening?

God is Good! And so the Psalmist meets that issue head on by declaring that God is good. God is good does not mean that all things are good. God has created us (humanity) and He has created us with a free will and as a result of that free will, we have caused things to go way wrong and so there is evil in our world. That, however, does not mean that God is still not good—perfectly good, eternally good.

So, here we are with this definition of the character of God: He is God and He is good! But you say, “Steve, you have not said one thing that would convince someone of either one of those things.” I’ve thought about that a lot this week. Here’s my answer: I can’t. Beyond that, that quite simply, I have determined, is not my job. That is God’s job.

Here’s the point: Belief in God is a matter of fact believed by faith confirmed by experience. I do not believe in God because I read about Him in a book. I believe in God because I have believed by faith and that faith has been confirmed by experience.

This is consistent with God’s activity in the lives of those throughout history. I’ve finished reading recently the Book of Ezekiel. Over and over again, God says through the Prophet Ezekiel, I am doing this or that so that you will “know that I am the LORD.”

You no doubt have heard about the story of Steven Curtis Chapman’s family. Some weeks ago, their 17 year old son accidentally ran over their adopted little girl. The Chapmans have been on both Good Morning America and Larry King Live this week. Steven Curtis Chapman said, “Faith is not the absence of questions, it is the presence of questions.”

The Call of God

So, what are we to do? I was asked this week a very good question about this message series. The question was “So what is going to be the challenge that is given in this series of messages?” This is a very good question and one that I had already been prompted to think about. There is a call from God as we think about the fact that He is God and that He is good. There is an invitation that He extends for us. In fact, there are several.

1. The Invitation to Know Him!
2. The Invitation to Worship Him! (Throughout this passage are promptings to worship.)
3. The Invitation to Follow Him! “Sheep of His pasture.”

What will this kind of belief in God do for you? I think the example from the Nickel Mines Amish Community in Pennsylvania helps us to see what a strong belief in God and His goodness will do for us. You remember the story of October 5, 2006. Charles Carl Roberts IV, a milkman burst into a schoolhouse to carry out a most extreme kind of violence. Entering the building armed with 600 rounds of ammunition and building supplies, he first built a barricade. He intended to kill everyone there for

what he said was his anger at God. He shot all 10 of the children in the schoolroom, fatally wounding five of them.

But here is where the story takes a turn. Rather than deal with their grief with anger, the Amish community reached out in love. Many of them attended his funeral and invited his widow to attend the funeral of the girls. In addition, when money began pouring in from all over the nation to help with the mounting hospital bills of the wounded, the community leaders demanded that a portion of that money be set up to take care of the killer's widow and three children.³

³ Colson, p. 13-15.