

# 2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

## G-O-D

Presented by Harry Goodhew

### INTRODUCTION

Good morning. I hope you're feeling alert this morning because I want to play a little game with you.

Ready? Here are three letters from the English alphabet. What word or words can you quickly make of them?

Here they are: First, D for Delta, then G for Golf, and then, O for Oscar. Got it? D, G, O.

If you're a Scrabble player you're off and running. You may have started with "dog". If you did, you would certainly know what the word referred to. "Of course", you would say, "I have one at home. He has a tail, four legs, and he barks". If you had a penchant for exactitude you might say you were referring to "a domesticated carnivore, *Canis familiaris*, bred in a great many varieties". Well, good for you. Well done!

What about another possibility: say g o d - "god"? If you formed that word what thoughts would come into your mind? What content do you give to the word "god"? After this music, let me come back and think for a bit about what g-o-d might mean.

### SEGMENT 1

Well, back to g-o-d, god.

It's a word that will have different meanings for different people. If you are a Jew, or a Muslim, a Hindu, or a Buddhist, a Pagan, a Pantheist, an Animist, an Agnostic, an Atheist, or a Christian – you will fill the word with very different meanings.

If I were asked what it meant for me, as a Christian I think I might choose to fill the content of the word "god" with words taken from St. Paul. In his first letter to the Christian Church in Corinth in Chapter 8 at verses 5 and 6 he wrote:

<sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Now, this is a remarkable statement for a number of reasons. In the first place it recognises that for many who then lived in Corinth there were numerous "gods" and "lords" on offer to claim their loyalty and worship. It also serves to remind us that today in our world, there are also numerous 'gods' who claim the loyalty and devotion of millions. Yes, there are a variety of options available today to fill out the meaning of the word "god". Ours is not a "god"-less world. And what's more, we all make choices about those numerous claims. We choose one rather than the other, or none at all, or we think we can lump them all together and thereby avoid making any choice.

However, a second element is perhaps even more remarkable. Paul's words are in fact, based on a passage from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy. In chapter 6 at verse 4 Moses says, "Hear O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." These words formed the heart of the Jewish creed: there is only one God and He is Jehovah the God of Israel. The Jewish people maintained this confession with their blood. Today, these words are a central part of Jewish daily prayers.

Notice what Paul, who was himself a Jew and a passionate believer in the uniqueness of Jehovah the God of Israel, has done. He's divided the words of Moses. He has taken the first part speaking of one God and related that to the Father. But then he has taken the second part and related it to Jesus, calling him "Lord" in the sense in which it is used by Moses. He has, in fact, incorporated Jesus into the "Oneness" of Israel's God putting him on the "God"-side of the line that divides the Creator from that which he has created.

Those early Christians offered worship to God and Jesus with no sense that in any way were they worshipping two Gods. God was One.

This is more than just a little theological nicety. It's a vital and life determining fact in the Christian understanding of God. But, more in a moment.

## **SEGMENT 2**

Now, in that very same letter to Corinth, as in his other letters contained in the New Testament, Paul speaks often of the Spirit of God. He will at times name that Spirit also as the Spirit of Jesus. It was from material like this that what is known as the doctrine of the Trinity was fashioned to give some sort of expression to this revelation of the unique character of the One God who revealed himself through Israel for the salvation of all peoples.

So, for me, as a Christian, the word "god" has a very specific meaning. "God" means that One God about whom our passage from Paul says, "from whom all things came and for whom we live", the One who called Abraham and his descendants to be the vehicle through whom He would redeem his fallen world; the One, who from that people brought Jesus the one "Lord", "through whom all things came and through whom we live"; the One who redeemed humanity and the world in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and who poured out his Spirit upon his people as a seal and guarantee of his ownership as they wait expectantly for his promised final restoration of his damaged creation.

In an ancient Christian Creed called the Creed of St. Athanasius that forms part of the faith of a number of historic churches these words occur about this subject. It says: "Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith ... And the catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity."

Now all this is challenging and quite a mouthful especially early on a Sunday morning but it is important. This revelation about how we are to understand the "oneness" of the God whom Christians worship in effect tells a story. The story is the story of the Bible that runs from Creation to New Creation, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. It is the story of how God created all that exists, how, over a very long and complex history he has worked to restore what human disobedience corrupted and how he will restore, renew and transform what he has made to display the glory that it was made to reflect.

This story contained in the Christian content to the word "god" is the reason for the blunt statement of the Athanasian Creed. It is in knowing this story and trusting in the One who reveals himself in this story that redemption is to be found.

### SEGMENT 3

The Bible gives no definition of God, that is, of the ultimate nature of the One to whom the Bible gives the title of the one true God. There are statements like “God is spirit” and “God is love” but they fall far short of a final definition of who or what God is in himself and to himself. There is a good reason for that: we are what we are, creatures; we simply lack the capacity to understand. As our world is in size compared to the vastness of the cosmos, so God is to us and then some. God as he is in himself lies far beyond the level of our comprehension. He is God. However, because our true wellbeing consists in knowing him what he has given us is something we can grapple with: a story.

That is why we read the Bible. That is the story. There God reveals himself. Do I want to know what meaning I am to give to the word “god”? It is to the Bible and the story that it tells that I must turn.

Nor is this simply a question over which to exercise our intellects. It is a story that reaches out to our hearts through our heads. It is a story that has its focus in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return of Jesus to bring God’s redeeming purpose to its great climax. This is the place and this is the person in whom God has most powerfully and wonderfully revealed himself. Does God care for individuals? Does God care for you? Look at the life of Jesus. Is God love? Look at the cross. Does God hate evil and will he finally eliminate it? Look again at the cross and the resurrection. Is there purpose in this world of ours that although so beautiful often looks more like a mad house? Look at the cross, the resurrection, and Jesus’ word that “all authority in heaven and earth had been given to me” and trust him for the final outcome. As Jesus’ promised resurrection certainly took place in God’s time so his promised authority and rule over all things will finally be revealed in his own time.

### CONCLUSION

Now to conclude.

John, in his Gospel, records Jesus addressing his Father in prayer. Jesus prayed: “this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”<sup>1</sup>

So this matter about what “g-o-d” means is important. Eternal life is involved. Jesus said eternal life is to be experienced through a true and personal knowledge of the God who has revealed himself in the history recorded in the Bible and present with us in himself.

So, to know God is to know life.

God bless, and have a good day.

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<sup>1</sup> John 17:3