

Introduction

The God of the bible exists. He is not mythical. He is not a fictitious relic of an ancient superstition. He is not an invention of ancient despots who wanted to control human behavior with notions of an invisible God, all seeing and inescapable, always overseeing our moral and legal performance. God is not a stern pious old man somewhere in the sky, sitting or hovering among the clouds with flowing white robes and a long beard. He will not fade away like the false gods of Greek and Roman mythology. We know God exists in the depths of our own nature. We can see clear evidence of His existence throughout creation. We can willfully suppress our awareness of God if we wish to be free of Him, but we can never expel our God sense from our hearts and minds.

God is not harsh, cruel or capricious. He is not aloof or indifferent to us. He does not take pleasure in our suffering or our spiritual confusion. God's will does not equal repression of all pleasures. God has not created us for judgment, condemnation and punishment. God has not intended that we would not understand Him. Surely it must grieve God that so many of us live our lives in ambivalence, resistance and even open hatred and hostility toward Him.

Christianity is the mutually exclusive one true religion on earth. Judeo-Christian scripture reveals the only true God. Jesus was the Messiah expected by the Jews. I declare this to be true realizing this certainty of conviction is distasteful in the modern first world. Nonetheless, the God of the bible exists and we must deal with Him. Jesus was and is the Son of God, a unique and extraordinary divine man. All people will face this reality. As scripture says, every knee will bow.

Christianity's religious moral emphasis resulting in poorly formed theologies and doctrines, divides and discredits Christianity in the world. Our many sects and denominations, divided over politics

and theology, testify against our spiritual validity. In my adolescent ignorance, before I came to Christian faith I judged all Christian denominations to be odd subcultures of inbred narrow-mindedness and incubated ignorance. After I came to faith as an eighteen year old college student I still had no confidence in any church or denomination. There is obvious sectarian strife and conflict in global Christianity. Our historic lack of unity diminishes Christian spiritual credibility. Our best efforts to form reliable positions on God and scripture lead us into more conflict and division.

Permit me to offer a loving disclaimer about churches. We cannot necessarily expect churches to spiritually nurture and develop us. It is necessary to ponder the state of Christianity in the world but not profitable to judge churches as I did in my youth. It is profitable to put the limitations of institutional Christian religion in perspective. Churches are filled with imperfect people with a variety of motives for involvement. If we walk into a church building seeking God we may well be disappointed. Who is that person responsible for our well-being that we would expect them to meet us at the door with a warm greeting and sublime spiritual competence to meet our needs? Let us walk through the door with a goal of becoming that person we might hope to meet. It is a better and more realistic goal and expectation. Evaluating a church is a delicate matter and not really the subject of this book. I suggest we tread lightly on churches and church life. Churches are full of sinners like us, doing their best to make their way through life. What then should we expect from a church?

The philosophical, theological and cultural static which hinders and confuses us producing many conflicting ideas about God and truth can be overcome. That is the subject of this book. You will say, "what is philosophical, theological and cultural static?" It is a broad generalization representing the dynamic crush of ideas which stand between us and God in the infrastructure of our hearts and minds. It is our individually unique body of knowledge and beliefs, our

world view, much of which may be contrary or superfluous to our spiritual objective to attain to the heart, mind and perspective of Christ. The sum of that divine personality and perspective exists as an ideal toward which we strive as spiritual mendicants. We accept that this divine formation is unattainable. Yet we do well to strive toward it. Spiritual life consists in godliness. Seeking God and truth contributes to the development of godliness. It is the task God has set before us. We are His children. We are about the business of becoming as He is, not in power but in character and love. Consider that God must love the human learning curve. He constantly kills the old who have had their opportunity to seek Him and live well before Him and replaces them with infants who have the whole developmental process ahead of them. That God loves the human learning curve, is patient with our striving and merciful with our failures should be an encouragement to us all.

Arriving at that true understanding of God, finding truth is both difficult and dangerous. Consider what the world did to Jesus, the supreme voice of spiritual truth. So, if we seek God and genuinely want to go beyond what is available, taking instruction in the pews of a church, we do well. However, if we succeed, if we learn of God, if we reach that state of heart of mind wherein we “**worship God in spirit and truth**” as Jesus described it and draw near to God, the price can be high. To know God as the Spirit of God can make Him known to us has great rewards but also may produce an exquisite social isolation. To become intimate with God is to become odd to the world. Look at scripture, the historical record and see how odd the Old Testament prophets were within their generation, how odd John the Baptist and Jesus Himself were within their native Hebrew culture. Nonetheless, to know God and perhaps be alone with Him is preferable to being in tune with popular culture.

Understanding God need not be rare and unusual. God is not obscure or elusive but finding Him, developing intimacy with Him, does require a deliberate and diligent effort to seek Him. He created

us and equipped us as beings made in His image that we might seek after Him with spiritual faculties. Just as a child learns physical and communal life from their biological parents, we learn about spiritual and eternal life from our Father in heaven. Yet many fail to take advantage of our most precious birthright, our opportunity to know God personally. We may think we can let clergy handle this for us, believing such matters beyond the reach of laypersons. To rely on professional clergy to handle and define our relationship with God for us is a grave spiritual error. More typically, when we pursue God independently prior religious training hinders us. Much of humanity comes of age mired in spiritually erroneous and irrelevant religious dogma. Typically, we have biases to overcome to draw near to God. However, we need not despair. Becoming intimate with God is doable. God is the living factor overcoming obstacles for those who seek Him with a full and open heart and mind.

God desires that all people would be intimate with Him. Our spiritual birthright is God dwelling with us and within us. Human life's truest and greatest fulfillment is intimacy with God. Knowledge of God, Christ and the Spirit is the basis of eternal life.

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

John 17:1-3