

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO GOD?

By

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If man is made in the image of God then his chief concern is to know God, to be like Him and to enjoy Him forever. The Gospel is not an end in itself, the means to an end: the arrival at God! "No man comes unto the Father but by Me," said Jesus.

Where there is not understanding of God, there can be no aspirations toward Him. A college student, confronted with evolution and opposition to Christian faith, wrote, "Many people have a vague concept about who God really is. They have stripped Him of His personality. They think of Him as some luminous celestial body with no definite shape or form. Others think of God as some mysterious power which cannot be defined or understood. It is little wonder that with these concepts of God, He has been declared dead." Where the nature and attributes of God are unknown there can hardly be any true concern for reflecting His image and obeying His commandments.

Even among people who regularly attend church there is little understanding of God. They are engaged in "church activities," given pep talks, ho-to-do-it lectures and conversion sermons; they are encouraged to pray to God, to be Godly, and to win other to God; they are to give to God, serve God, and desire to see Him and spend eternity with Him; but seldom if ever are they taught anything about Him, His nature and His attributes. It is no wonder that many churches have to give prizes to get people to ride their buses to the church house.

Richard Wilson writes that "The world has de-personalized God." (The Christian Advocate, 2/76). He quotes Dr. Edwin A Burt: "God is no longer the central fact in religion or the controlling principle in theology. His place is taken by man's religious experience by that selected phase of human doing and suffering which appears to be distinguishable from the secular phases of life and is emphasized in people whom all recognize as especially religious." While this was written by Professor Burt many years ago it is a timely comment on the modern religious movement of "personal experience." It is nothing uncommon for so-called evangelists to boast of the great experiences of some of their converts (Not Christ's converts!) and make these experiences the basis of appeal. It is not the preaching of the Gospel of God, but the presentation of the gospel of Experience, with a few well chosen references to God as approving of the whole thing. God is interpreted on the basis of experience rather than experience being interpreted on the basis of God.

It is not surprising how close this experience-centered religion comes to the atheistic religion of revolutionaries such as Squeaky Fromme, the 27 year old who tried to assassinate President Ford. She said, "If you have no philosophy, you don't have any rules." If you depersonalize God, consider Him "mystical power," "power of the universe" or any other impersonal "thing," you then operate by your own experiences. You interpret these experiences according to your own feelings. As Squeaky says, "you don't have any rules." And this is just what is happening in the case of millions in America who go to church and think they are religious.

If God is not a personal God, with specific attributes, then he is no God at all. If God has certain definable attributes, then these must be the same to everyone. For example, if God is intrinsically good, then He must be good in his relationship to you, to me, to a Chinaman, a Russian, to all. If God is Just; that is, if absolute justice is one of the attributes of God, a part of His make-up, then He is just to every person in the world. It is this fact, that God is a Person with certain qualities and attributes, that gives meaning to Christian faith and, in fact to life itself.

But where there is no understanding of the personal nature of God, what kind of person He is, then there is no basis for faith. The Christian faith says that God is of a certain nature, that all things are created in keeping with that nature, and that all must be accounted for according to immutable laws governed by that nature. Christ's death is indeed foolishness to those who cannot believe in a personal God of justice. The hope of resurrection to an immortal life is just "pie in the sky" to those who can think no further than a mystical power or "somebody up there."

This depersonalizing of God encourages the "dumping ground" philosophy suggested by Rousas Rushdoony (Chalcedon Report #128). He cites the dumping ground as a place where nothing has any relationship to anything around it. Things are simply dumped there and lie side-by-side but with no useful or meaningful relationship to each other. He says this is the existential philosophy; nothing governs all the facts and relationship of things dumped. "Each piece of junk must develop its own philosophy of existence or else have none."

This is the way of 20th Century Religion. Each person places his own value on his separate experience, and out of it tries to derive some concept of what he calls God. Some of the worst perpetrators of this philosophy are religious leaders themselves. Experiences, with emotional vibrations, which set them apart from ordinary routine actions, have become the center of attraction both in and out of the church, taking the place of the worship of God. Preaching is aimed at producing an inner emotional experience, not at exalting God. The apostles preached that which was pleasing to God. Modern preachers make a survey to see what is most pleasing to men, then preach accordingly. The apostles took pains to explain God's person and purpose, to bring men to respond to God: modern evangelists take pains to explain men's experiences to bring about a response to their manipulations.

When Paul went into Athens he pointed out that there was an altar to an "unknown God." He then said, "what you worship in ignorance, this I set forth unto you." Then proceeded basic truths about God, His creative power, His Lordship over the universe, His possession of all things, His goodness, His Sovereignty, His mercy, His righteousness and His justice, concluding with the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:223-31). The churches of our day have little more concept of God than those Athenians did. Jesus is presented as a handy-man who solves all problems, as a buddy, as a lover, and God as a doting granddaddy who "loves you" no matter what. I have found few people who have a solid faith in God as Sovereign, few who never really question His goodness in adverse circumstances of their lives and even fewer still who understand that God is absolutely just in every act toward every living being.

Without some knowledge of God's nature and attributes it is impossible to have faith in Him. "How shall they believe in whom they have not heard?...belief comes of hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:14, 17).

Jesus said, “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent” (John 17:3).

“Thus said the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord which exercises loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, said the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23–24). Loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness! These are attributes of God we are to understand.

God expects man to understand His personal existence by that which He has created. “The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity” (Rom. 1:20). “His glory covers the heavens.” “The earth is full of thy riches” (Hab. 3:3, Psa. 104:24).

But to merely know that God exists is not to know God. God has revealed Himself, His personal characteristics, His intrinsic nature and His purpose, through 1) the revealed history, 2) the prophets, and 3) the person of Christ. Christ severely criticized the Pharisees because they did not know God. Enough was already revealed before Christ entered the world for men to have an understanding of God. Jesus said that if they had believed the revelation given by Moses they would have recognized the Christ (John 5:46). If we are to know God we need to study the writings of Moses, the other Biblical books of history, the Psalms and the prophets. It is when we are fully acquainted with God of the Old Testament Scriptures that we can appreciate the revelation given in the person of Jesus. But as long as the concept of God is an “oblong blur” the Christian faith will continue to be a hodge-podge of contradictory concepts without any power to motivate and direct and perfect the believer.

The apostle Paul wrote “We do not cease to pray for you...that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you might walk worthily of the Lord into all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness” (Col. 1:9–11).

God invites us to know Him. He insists on it. To know him means, in the words of Paul, to have “knowledge of God”, and not to rely on a personal experience of our own lives.

Work shops and pep talks can have value to the person who is already grounded in the faith through a knowledge of that which God has revealed about Himself. But for the average they only add to his frustration. He continues to **try** to be a Christian, but without the basis upon which Christian faith rests. Better that preachers, teachers, editors and seminary professors begin teaching the truth about God: What He is like, His personal characteristics, His attributes, and His purpose.

Scripture abounds in material on God’s goodness, His sovereignty, His righteousness, His knowledge, His power, His purpose, His mercy, His wrath and His love. Take a concordance and look them up. One who gains some acquaintance with these attributes of God will never again refer to Him as the “man upstairs” or the “infinite consciousness,” but will approach Him humbly and adoringly as “Our Father.” He will no more flee **from** Him, but will flee **to** Him. He will no longer want to talk of his

“experiences” but will focus attention on the experiences of God in His mighty acts of justice and mercy, summed up in the gospel of Christ.

The basic study of every Christian is the Godhead. Yet there are millions of people who read books and attend studies on how to get something **from** God when they have never bothered to get acquainted **with** God, the giver of every good gift. It is He with whom we have to do. It is He whose eye is upon us, whose justice must be met, in whose hand is the breath of life and who is the potter to mould each vessel. His character is wonderful, perfect and lovely. He hasn't changed. Men have rebelled against Him and now stand in ignorance of Him. We who are to be conformed to His image are privileged to know Him, to learn more of His glory, and to hold Him forth to all the world.

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