

Getting To Know God

God says to us in the Bible, “Come, let us reason together.” He wants us to apply our logic and our common sense to every situation and circumstance, because He gave us that reasoning and logic. Logic says that the Bible can be true, or it can be false. It must be one or the other, because it cannot be both. The publishing world classifies books as either fiction or non-fiction (i.e., fact). Since the Bible is obviously not a work of fiction, it must be fact. Its writers are named and known and have been since they originally put ink on parchment. The Bible tells us that God inspired all those writers to say what He told them to say, as in “Thus says the Lord”...over and over and over again.

All the miseries that befall humanity are not part of God's perfect will for us. In the perfect world to come there will be no evil, no disease, no pain, no suffering, and no death. In that perfect world, animals will not devour each other. The Bible says the lion will lie down with the lamb, and all of God's people will be able to dwell in “peace and safety” when they submit to the lordship of the God who gave them life. There will be no more war, no fear of the future, and no sorrow. Scripture tells us that God Himself will wipe away all tears from the eyes of humanity. We will then have what the Bible calls “pleasures forever” because we will be in the permanent presence of God where there is always “fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). We have this wonderful and glorious hope before us, all because of God's amazing kindness! In fact, Jesus told us to pray for this in what is commonly called *The Lord's Prayer* when He told His disciples to pray in this way: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

Unfortunately, someone who does not believe what God has told us will not have the hope of living in God's perfect world. It is as if a non-believer is standing on his own oxygen hose. Our world is now chaotic and out of control because people refuse to trust God. When God says to us, in effect, “Give Me the steering wheel for a while and see if you like what I want to do for you,” we still want that driver's seat rather than to relax in the back seat with God at the controls. The irony here is that God is at the controls all the time and we do not realize it. God is offering us the best ride possible in a top-of-the-line limo, and we keep telling Him “no, I really like to drive, thanks anyway.”

Think about a good judge in a court of law today. Before him stands a guilty and unrepentant criminal. The criminal smiles wickedly as the judge addresses him before passing sentence. The judge cannot help but feel anger as he thinks about the terrible crime committed by the man who stands before him, and the way that man has brought equally terrible grief and pain into the lives of the family or families affected by the crime. Think about a mass shooting, perhaps with dozens of completely unknowing, unexpected victims killed by the evil person now about to be sentenced. A good and impartial judge would feel the grief and pain of the affected families. His hands might shake with anger as he looks at the embodiment of evil before him. It is the judge's goodness that motivates his wrath. If he were not angry, he would not be a good judge; to not be angry, he would have to be almost as cold-hearted as the killer himself.

Like that judge in the courtroom, God desires to bring to justice all the evil – and the evildoers – that He sees before Him. Unlike that judge, God knew at the outset that the world He had created was going to become extremely evil. But at the outset God already had put a plan into place to address all the evil. It was going to require a perfect, absolutely pure sacrifice to overcome it.

God is so pure, so terrifyingly holy, that no sin is greater than another. That means “you shall not murder” is equal to “you shall not steal” or “you shall not lie” in the eyes of God. The Bible tells us “our God is a *consuming fire*.” The only way sinners like you and me could ever stand in His holy presence and see His glory without being totally consumed by it would be if we were pure of heart.

We read in the Bible, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) In the eyes of God, we are made pure in heart when we accept His Son, Jesus, as our Savior, when we understand not just the gravity of our crimes against a pure, holy, and just God, but also the gravity of the sacrifice necessary to bring us back to that just and holy God. Our redemption cost the life of the Son of God – the Son who was not guilty of any crime but who loved us enough to pay our fine and send us out of the courtroom completely acquitted and set free.

We learn in Leviticus in the Old Testament that “the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life in it that makes atonement.” We are told in the New Testament, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22) Just as all sins against God and His law were to Him equally offensive, so the blood to be shed to justify our forgiveness would have to be the purest of the pure. Jesus was the only One qualified to become the needed sacrifice.

Once we understand all of this, the existence of hell becomes understandable also. If God is good, He must be angry at evil and He must have a place of punishment for those who do evil. If you were to ask anyone with even a minimal sense of right and wrong what Hitler's eternal fate should be, that is, whether he should go to heaven or hell, the answer is obvious and always the same: Hitler must be punished, and no punishment is severe enough. The question is not “How could a good God create hell?” but rather “How could a God who is good *not* create hell?”

God was deadly serious when He said, “The soul who sins shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:20) But that's not the end of the story. The cross is a reminder that God was just as serious about His love for all of those “created in His image” who are lawbreakers.

If you've been holding onto a “vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly,” to quote A. W. Tozer, I trust you now see that the hope you've been counting on is a false hope indeed.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

God's standard of morality is not just high, it's absolute perfection in thought, word, and deed. If we sin just once by breaking God's law and thereby His standard, we are disqualified from benefitting by trying to adhere to that standard. Morality cannot exist without God. Neither can love. Love and morality would not exist without God, because love and morality and justice are from His very being. God's standard is shown to us here: “Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10) Unless, that is, they turn from their sin and seek God's forgiveness. Because the Bible also says “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

God loves all people, and because of that love He wants them to be free from sin. Nothing is ever hidden from His morally perfect eyes, and nothing can stop Him from fulfilling His passion to see that justice is done.

Ask yourself these three very simple questions; they deserve three very honest answers:

1. Do I believe there is an afterlife?
2. Do I think I am a good person?
3. Am I afraid of dying?

Most people answer all three questions with a “yes.” If there is an afterlife, which God assures us there is over and over in the Bible, then all you need to do is make sure you know your “afterlife destination.” According to the Bible there are only two possibilities – smoking or non-smoking. ;o)

If you affirm that of course you are a good person, which is what almost everyone will say, then just ask yourself “Have I ever told a lie? Have I ever stolen anything? Have I ever taken God's name in vain? Have I ever committed fornication or adultery?” (If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, you are in big trouble from the perspective of a holy, perfect, and righteous God.)

The last of the three simple questions could be the most important.

Christians are not better than non-Christians, they are just better off. They are like two men in a plane which is only minutes from crashing into the side of a mountain. Both men have to jump. The man wearing a parachute is not better than the other man, but he is certainly *better off!*

Christianity is not about being good. It's about wearing a parachute. Those who trust in the Son, the One who was willing to pay our fine and guarantee us a wonderful eternal life with the God of the universe, are wearing the only parachute which will save us from the power of death and the horror of hell and damnation.

Salvation is not about doing, it's about trusting the only One who has earned that trust. To trust in anyone or anything other than the Savior is complete foolishness.

The Bible tells us very clearly that “God is not willing that any should perish.” He knows that due to our own stubborn wills and our sinful nature many of us are *going to perish...*but that is not what He wants for us.

Back in the very beginning of the Bible God gave us “dominion”. That word is used fairly often in the Bible, in fact. God gave us dominion over the earth. He told us to subdue it and to multiply, meaning simply to populate it and to use the earth to make a better life here for ourselves. But our dominion also includes our own will, our own ability to make decisions about both our present life and our future existence.

God did not create the universe and the planet called Earth and then leave us to our own devices. He made sure we had enough evidence to come to a secure realization about ourselves, about the way the world works, and about God Himself. Creation should be evidence enough that there is a God who loves us. (The existence of DNA in each of our cells should by itself confirm our Creator for us. Each DNA strand is about 1.8 meters long, but it is packed into a space in the cell which is only one one-thousandth of a millimeter. That's like trying to squeeze 30 miles of fishing line into a blueberry! Nobody but God would even attempt that!) But the death and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, should be the clincher. That's why God went to all the trouble to inspire prophets and others to write the Bible and tell us about Himself.

If it helps, think of the BIBLE as standing for **B**asic **I**nstructions **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth. And be very sure you have your parachute.

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