

Back to *Bible Study*: Study 2

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STUDY 2 OBJECTIVE : TO DISCUSS THE RELEVANCE OF THE BIBLE TO THE CHRISTIAN

Did we create God, or did God create us?

God is not...Religious, Nice, "One of us", An American, A Capitalist is the title of a recent book. It discusses misconceptions about God.

It is an interesting exercise to explore how our construct of God has been shaped by our family and friends; by literature and the arts; by television and media; by songs and folklore; by our own desires and needs; and, of course, by religious experiences and popular philosophy.

The reality is that God is neither a construct nor a concept. God is not an idea, an abstract notion of our fertile minds.

Biblically, everything, even our thoughts and our ability to create ideas, comes from the God whom we did not create or whose character and attributes have not been shaped by us (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3): the God who, simply, is. God has neither origin nor end.

In the beginning was not a human idea about God, rather in the beginning (a time reference used by God for our finite understanding) was God (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1). We did not create God, but God created us in His image (Genesis 1:27).

God is, therefore we are. The everlasting God is the Creator of all things (Acts

17:24-25; Isaiah 40:28, etc), and it is only by His will that everything continues to exist (Revelation 4:11).

Many books speculate on what God is like. No doubt we could come up with a list of adjectives and nouns that would inform our view of who God is and of what He does. The aim of this study is, however, to note how God is described in Scripture, and to discuss why those descriptions are significant to the believer.

Reflection

Take time to write down what you think God is like.

To what extent are your impressions of God based on your past experience, on the views of peers and friends, on family and school life, on current societal opinions, on your image of yourself?

The Bible describes the Creator as eternal, invisible, all-knowing, & all-powerful

God pre-exists His creation (Psalm 90:2), and He "inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15). "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18), and He is not physical, but "God is Spirit" (John 4:24). He is not confined by time and space, and nothing is hidden from Him (Psalm 139:1-12; 1 Kings 8:27; Jeremiah 23:24). He "knows all things" (1 John 3:20).

In Genesis 17:1 God explains to Abraham, "I am Almighty God", and in Revelation 4:8 the four living creatures proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" "The voice of the

Lord is powerful; and the voice of the Lord is full of majesty” (Psalm 29:4).

Paul directs Timothy:

“Now to the King Eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17)

Similar descriptions of deity can be found in pagan literature and non-Christian religious traditions.

Paul suggests that, by looking at the wonder of creation, the sovereignty of God ought to be obvious to everyone. “For”, he says, “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen” (Romans 1:20).

Paul’s view is quite clear: people “became futile in their thoughts” (1:21) and created their own religions and idolatries. He also indicates in Acts 17:22-31 that men and women can be sincerely confused about the Divine Nature.

Is there a qualitative difference between the Christian God and other deities?

The biblical perspective is that the idols, the ancient pantheons of Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian and other mythologies, the objects of worship in other religions today and in the past, are not divine in any way because “the Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is no god like the true God (Exodus 15:11; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 86:8, 95:3).

Isaiah explains that other gods “are nothing” (41:24), and Paul affirms that these “so-called gods” have no divinity as “there is no other God but one”, “one God, the Father, of whom are all things” (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?” asks Malachi, rhetorically (2:10). See also Ephesians 4:6.

Appreciating the majesty and being in awe of the one God is important for the believer. It is not sufficient, however, of and by itself. “Behold, God is great, and we do not know him” (Job 36:26). A notable comparative difference between the worship of the biblical God and the worship of other so-called gods is that the biblical God wants us to know Him intimately, and He also wants to know us personally and individually. God the Father does not want to relate with us from a distance. He is “near at hand” and He is “not a God afar off” (Jeremiah 23:23).

Reflection

How would you describe the greatness of God?

How would you define the difference between the biblical God and the god(s) of other religions?

God is....

Thus the God, in whose image we are made, is one. An implication of being created in God’s image is the possibility that we can be like Him. But what is God like? Much of Scripture is dedicated to the revelation of who God is and what is He like.

Let’s consider some scriptural ideas about God, and we will see how the understanding of what God is like suggests spiritual qualities to be developed in the believer in his or her relationships with others.

Significantly, Scripture does not direct the believer to try to reflect God’s image in terms of greatness, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.

God is holy (Revelation 6:10; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 78:41, 99:9, 111:9, etc)

God is glorious in His holiness (Exodus 15:11). Many theologians define holiness as the state of being set apart or dedicated for

divine purpose. Holiness is the whole collection of attributes that defines who God is and that sets Him apart from false gods.

Hebrews 12:14 tells us that without holiness “no one will see the Lord”. “...as He who called you is holy, you also be holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16; Leviticus 11:44). We are to be “partakers of His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

God is love and full of compassion (1 John 4:8; Psalms 112:4, 145:8)

The above passage in 1 John says that those who know God are identifiable by their outgoing concern for others because God is love. Love flourished within the Godhead “before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24) because love is the inherent nature of God.

Because He shows compassion believers are to show compassion to one another (1 Peter 3:8, Zechariah 7:9).

God is gracious, merciful, forgiving (1 Peter 2:3; Exodus 34:6; Psalms 86:15, 111:4, 116:5, etc)

An expression of God’s love is “the multitude of His mercies” (Lamentations 3:32). God is “ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness” (Nehemiah 9:17). “To the Lord God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him” (Daniel 9:9).

“The God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10) expects His grace to be spread abroad (2 Corinthians 4:15), and for Christians to reflect His grace and forgiveness in how they deal with others (Ephesians 4:32).

God is good (Luke 18:19; 1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 25:8, 34:8, 86:5, 145:9)

Goodness implies that God blesses beyond expectations in kindnesses and mercies. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is

from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

The reception of God’s goodness is a preparation for repentance - “do you despise the riches of His goodness...not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4)

The God, who is “able to do exceedingly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20), tells the believer to “do good to all” for he or she “who does good is of God” (3 John 11).

Reflection

How does studying what God is like help you as a Christian?

Do you see how attributes of God inform us of how we should reflect His image?

Are there personal areas in your own life that you need to take to God in prayer as a result of this study?

God is for us (Romans 8:31)

Of course, God is so much more than physical language can describe. “His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3).

How can we possibly know Him and reflect His image? How can we fulfill His desire that we be holy, loving, full of compassion, gracious, merciful, forgiving and good?

God, “with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17) and whose loving character and grace-filled purpose does not change (Malachi 3:6), has provided a way for us. He is for us, and desires that we become his children (1 John 3:1).

Hebrews 1:3 informs us that Jesus, the eternally begotten Son of God, is the very reflection of God’s inner being - “the

express image of His person". If we need a tangible concept of the image of the Father, Jesus is it. He is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

Christ said, "All things have been delivered to Me by the Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27).

The way to know God is through His Son.

Reflection

Are we able by ourselves to reflect fully God's image?

Can you think of ways in which God provides for mankind?

How can we understand the image of God and come to know Him?

Conclusion

Scripture reveals what God is like, and this is significant to the believer because we are created in God's image.

From the Statement of Beliefs of the Grace Communion International/ Worldwide Church of God UK:

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/aboutus/beliefs/#Father>

God the Father

"God the Father is the first Person of the triune God, of whom the Son is eternally begotten and from whom the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds through the Son. The Father, who made all things seen and unseen through the Son, sends the Son for our salvation and gives the Holy Spirit for our

regeneration and adoption as children of God."

(John 1:18; Romans 15:6; Colossians 1:15-16; John 3:16; 14:26; 15:26; Romans 8:14-17; Acts 17:28)

Additional reading material

See list of articles sourced by the Worldwide Church of God on:

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/God/default.htm>

Laythem, D. Brent. Editor. *God is not...Religious, Nice, "One of us", An American, A Capitalist.* 2004. Brazon Press: USA.

Packer, J.I. *Knowing God.* 1973, 1993, 2004. Hodder & Stroughton: UK.

Next Study

Who is Jesus Christ, and why is He central to the faith of the believer?