



THE GOD WE WORSHIP

The term “theology” literally means “the study of God.” However, my experience indicates that many don’t spend too much time getting to know what God is like and learning to appreciate how He works. Perhaps such information would mess up our own invented concepts. Now, I do not believe that the Biblical portrait of God’s nature and working is an expression of human imagination – I am taking it as inspired information that selected humans have passed on. I will explain why in a later article. We would be wise to spend some time getting to know what God is like (His “nature”) and how He interacts with His creation (His “workings”).

God’s Nature – The God of the Bible is the Creator, ruler, revealer, and redeemer. While the “Trinity” notion has always been a little tough for us to understand and explain, the Bible indicates some kind of Divine “we/us” from the beginning (Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). Add to this the deity of the Messiah (Isaiah 9:6; John 14:6-9; Colossians 1:19; 2:9) and other things said about the Spirit, and it seems best to think, as suggested by Jack Cottrell, in terms of three centers of consciousness in a divine unity.¹ If you think that idea is a bit tough, why should we think that the fullness and nature of God should simply and comfortably fit into our categories and conceptions? A God we can fully understand and explain is most likely one of our own invention. On the other hand, we can understand what God communicates to us in the same way privates can understand their orders without knowing everything the intelligence community and chiefs of staff are aware of in formulating battle plans.

Just what is God like? Well, I know that we resemble Him in some ways, for we were created “in His image” (Genesis 1:26), as Adam had a son “in his image” (Genesis 5:1,3). On the other hand, God is “not a man” (1Samuel 15:29; Hosea 11:9), but is eternal “Spirit” (John 4:24) and His intelligence, powers, and methods are far beyond ours (Isaiah 55:8,9). While God is the Creator of the natural world and animals and this creation tells us something about the Creator (Psalm 19:1ff; Romans 1:18-20), I would not advise trying to form a conception of God’s nature from looking *only* at what He created. Why not? Well, nothing that is made fully portrays the nature of its maker (a core problem with idolatry) – humans are far more than a cabinet, machine, building, or a prepared meal can represent. Even a statue or photograph tells you little about the person’s character, personality, or thinking. Also, the present natural universe is under a “curse” of futility (Romans 8:20) and is not really what it was intended to be. If all you have to base your notion of God upon is what you see in the cursed natural world – some evidence of design mixed with baffling anomalies, human & animal savagery, very little evidence of obvious Divine intervention for long periods of time, the wicked prosper while saints suffer, etc. – you would certainly not have enough information to arrive at the same view of God as you do when revealed information is factored in.

From the other form of “revelation” (objective; Scripture), I can know that God is a faithful covenant maker & keeper (Deuteronomy. 7:9,10). Thus, a primary characteristic of God’s nature is faithfulness to what He promises (Romans 3:3,4; 1Corinthians 10:13). The Old Testament writings are a testimony to God’s faithfulness – keeping His Messianic promise to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) is the key to understanding why God continued to work through rebellious Israel until Jesus appeared (Deuteronomy 7:7,8; 9:4,5; 2Kings 13:23; Romans 11:28; 15:8). Of course, we must be sure that we don’t claim promises that God didn’t make to us or we will be disappointed and confused. Apostles promised protection from poisonous snakes (Mark 16:17,18) were protected (Acts 28:1-6), but folks intentionally trying this in Appalachia sometimes die from snakebite. God has NOT promised physical health to the New Covenant faithful – that’s why early Christian leaders struggled with health problems as we do (Galatians 4:13,14; Philippians 2:25-27; 1Timothy 5:23; 2Timothy 4:20).

The Old Testament shows us something else about God – there is obviously something resembling our emotions in His nature, for Hosea shows how God longed for Israel’s return to Him (Hosea 11:8) and Ezekiel contains an impassioned expression of Divine agony at Israel continued waywardness (Ezekiel 18:31,32). While God is known for patience and longsuffering, it is not “endless,” for He can reach the point where He has had “enough” of human rebellion (Genesis 6; Jeremiah 1-11). Those who continually ignore God’s instructions can find themselves in a position where neither their prayers (Proverbs 28:9) nor even the prayers of others for them (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14) will be heard. God is capable of both kindness and severity (Romans 11:22), yet is impartial and fair in handling people (Romans 2:1-16; 10:11-13). While much else could be said, remember that Jesus is our best expression of God’s nature – if you want to “see” and understand what the Father is like, get to know Jesus (John 1:14,18; 14:6-9; 2Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:19; 2:9; Hebrews 1:3). (to be continued)

ⁱ Jack Cottrell, What the Bible Says About God The Redeemer (Joplin: College Press, 1987), p. 158.