

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF

In a time when the common belief of a modern society is that any belief in any god, and any belief in the existence of God is enough and should be accepted, when God is seen in everything created, when it is accepted that man himself is God, when He is described as "the force" or "the man upstairs" and when religious leaders refer to God as being "about six foot tall" (Kenneth Copeland) and God is made up of nine trinities (Benny Hinn), when the common belief in the religious world is that God is a Trinity that cannot be understood or explained, yet we are to accept this as being true, and when many sincere Christians believe the God of Islam is the God of the Christian, it is time we looked at the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. God has revealed Himself in His Son: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Luke 10:22). Here Jesus is establishing the fact that God can be known by men. If we know Christ, then we know God. John 14:7: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Further: "Philip said to him, 'Lord show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him. 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father; how do you say Show us the Father?'" Also: "He who beholds me beholds the One who sent me." (John 12:45). All this says God has revealed Himself to us in His son and we can therefore know and understand all God wants us know about Him. In fact our eternal life depends upon our knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ. "And this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). To say God is some trinitarian complexity we cannot understand is a contradiction of Scripture. The Apostle Paul stated in I Corinthians 2:12: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God." The "unknown God" whom many people worship today has been proclaimed to us (Acts 17:23).

Just to believe that there is a God is not enough, believing in the one God, yet believing He is other than what Jesus revealed Him to be is no better than the belief of demons. James 2:19: "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). This is Theism. Webster defines theism as "a belief in the existence of god or gods, specifically a belief in the existence of one God viewed as the creative source of man and the world who transcends yet is imminent in the world." In Exodus 32 when Aaron crafted the golden calf they said: "This is your God, O Israel that brought you out of the land of Egypt" (ver 4) and Aaron said "tomorrow is a feast to the Lord" (ver 5). Israel's mistake was not that they adopted the faith of their pagan neighbors, rather it was the redefinition of the true God who brought them out of Egypt. To redefine God and His word from that which He reveals Himself to be makes Him to be a God other than the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Neither is it sufficient to know God if one does not honor him as God. God has revealed Himself in Christ. In the condemnation of the

Gentile world the Apostle Paul stated: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21). If we take away the revelation of God in Jesus Christ we have no conception of what God is like. This explains the various ideas held today concerning God. When Christ asked his Apostles if they would separate themselves from him and the revelation that he was making (most of the people did at that time) they answered (loose translation) "Lord what will become of us? We have no place to go. You have the words of eternal life. There is nothing for us in Judaism anymore." The Jews believed in God because He had revealed Himself to them, but this was as nothing to the apostles now that they had seen the revelation of God as Father in Jesus. In the Old Testament the people knew God by His covenant name, Yahweh (Jehovah), which spoke to Israel of what God was in Himself rather than what He would be in relation to them. In the New Testament Jesus revealed God as Father, which was a new concept revealed in the life and teaching of Christ. Yet he did not divorce the idea of a covenant name for God because by one declaration, and that a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:4,5 he establishes that this God and Father is Jehovah (Matt. 22:37). It was not His teaching alone, but the life he lived that revealed God as Father. So he could say, "He that has seen me has seen the Father." If we take away from our conception of God what we owe to the person of Jesus Christ, we have very little left. Our attitude toward Jesus, then, determines our concept of God.

The Fatherhood of God fills the gospel of Christ. He continually spoke of God as his Father and taught us to pray "our Father". In the sermon of the mount he uses the word "God" five times and "Father" sixteen times. In the Gospel of John he uses the word "God" eleven times and "Father" sixty-six times. In speaking to God he always says "Father" never "God" except in the quotation from Psalm 22:1 on the cross (Matt. 27:46). In all his prayers he addresses God as His Father and taught us to pray to our Father. In his book *Knowing God* J.I. Packer states: "You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the Holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's Holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity find how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers, and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well."

It is popular to believe in a God of love and goodness but not a God of judgment and wrath. This view does not see God as Father. A father's love is not only manifested in his love and forgiveness, but is shown in the way he disciplines his children. For "if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12: 8,9). The apostle Paul tells us to "behold the kindness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22), and

## BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

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again “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). We are not to emphasize the goodness of God alone nor His severity alone, but to contemplate both together. Both are attributes of God. There is a lot of muddleheaded thinking and confusion when it comes to this aspect of faith in God. We have developed a Santa Claus theology of God that insulates Him from any responsibility for anything other than the comfort and well being of man. This denies His omnipotence and lordship over His world and makes the redemptive work of Christ on the cross as meaningless. It was the wrath and severity of God that nailed him to the cross and punished the sin of the believer. If God is unrelated to heart-breaking and destructive things like cruelty, hardship and physical suffering then His words to Moses “who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11) are not true. This shows that God is in control of every aspect of the life of mankind. He again tells Moses that He is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth, who forgives iniquity and sin, yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Exodus 34:6,7). This is a description of the Fatherhood of God.

There are special spiritual benefits derived from knowing God as Father. It is hard to understand suffering and hardships apart from this understanding of God. A simple belief in God as a supreme being gives us little comfort as we face the trials, pains and heartaches of life. This is why so many people ask “Why is God letting this happen to me?” It is difficult to understand the contradictions with which people live and with no hesitation reproach God for things they can’t accept. How can people live a life of rebellion, sin and disobedience, then have the audacity to be angry at God or question His actions? If He were not a good God and a God of grace they would have been judged and destroyed before they had the chance to complain against Him. In these instances they become, in the words of the German theologian Helmut Thielicke, “god of God”. The writer of Hebrews gives us a clue to this that so many times seems so mysterious to us when he speaks of the Father disciplining us for our good and gives us the consolation that “If you endure discipline, God deals with you as sons...be subject to the Father of spirits and live” (Heb. 12:7,9). Knowing God as Father makes forgiveness natural and possible. When we know God as a loving Father who forgives us, we are then more capable of forgiving others (Matt. 6:14,15; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Also it is knowing God as Father that enables us to understand and enter into a life of prayer. Christ both in his teaching and practice shows us how reasonable and natural it is to enter into a life of prayer to our Father.

The Apostles wrote: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; I Pet. 1:3). This is a new description of God. In the O.T. He is spoken of as “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and “the God of Israel”. Now He speaks of Himself as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ”. The God of Jesus is our God, and the Father of Jesus is our Father. If we want to know God we must come to this knowledge through Jesus’ revelation of God. Whatever God is to Jesus He is to us. He is “bringing many sons into glory” (Heb.2:10), and we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). We can only know God as Father by knowing the revelation of His Son.

Perhaps one of the most confusing passages in Scripture is Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 15:29: “Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?” There are too many opinionated interpretations of this passage to list them. Suffice it to say every commentary has some explanation of the text but none can say theirs is the correct one. To my knowledge the Mormons are the only ones who actually practice this baptism for the dead by proxy. This is one of those passages which we will never be able to agree with certainty what the meaning is. It seems logical to say Paul must have expected his readers to understand what he was talking about, but to us it seems to be a mystery. It must have meaning in the context of resurrection. I would like to present another interpretation which takes into consideration three principles.

First, in Paul’s writings he would sometimes deviate from his main topic and develop another thought in parentheses. For example: In Ephesians 3:1 he states “for this reason” but does not finish that sentence until verse 14 where he comes back to “this reason”. Verses 2-13 is a side issue of his main thought. Another example is Romans 6 and 7. His theme in chapters 1-5 is our justification by faith not law. He deviated from this subject in chapters 6 and 7 to explain how we are dead to sin and the law, then returns to his subject in chapter 8. In I Corinthians 15:12-19 Paul’s subject is “If Christ be not raised.” In verses 20-28 he leaves that theme for a moment and speaks of the exaltation and reign of Christ. Now let’s say in verse 29 he returns to his subject “If Christ is not raised...what will those do who are baptized...”

This brings us to a second principle: that of punctuation. In the Greek there is no punctuation so this must be supplied by the translators. Sometimes this can change the whole meaning of a passage. For example; the translation of Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross: “Verily I say unto you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Now put the comma in another place: “Verily I say unto you today, you will be with me in Paradise.” This change of the comma changes the whole thought of the passage. Apply this to I Corinthians 15:29: (If Christ be not raised from the dead) “Otherwise what will those do who are baptized?” (Question mark).

Now the third principle: In some passages there is an omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but must be supplied by the translators to make the sentence complete. (This is called an “ellipsis”). These words are written in *italics* in most translations. Examples: Romans 12:1: “present your bodies to God, *which* is your reasonable service...” I Corinthians 2:13: “which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.” And I Corinthians 12:1: “now concerning spiritual *gifts*...” (The word is “spirituals”). Applying this principle to I Corinthians 15:29: (If Christ is not raised from the dead) “Otherwise what will those do who are baptized? *Is it* for the dead? (Christ) If the dead are not raised at all why then are they baptized? *Is it* for them?” This puts this questionable passage in context with “if Christ be not raised from the dead”.

