

At Easter and Always, What Kind of God Do You Serve?

Whether or not you realize it, you are a theologian. Theology is nothing more than what you believe about God. And the kind of God you serve makes a tremendous difference in just about everything in your life.

When someone says, "I don't believe in God" ask them what kind of God they don't believe in. If their picture of God is someone who is out to get you, looking for a way to punish you, making up arbitrary do's and don'ts simply to keep you from having fun, then you can respond, "I don't believe in that God either." (And I hope you don't!)

But there's also another kind of God that I don't believe in. And I hope you don't believe in this kind of God either. This kind of God is nothing more than a heavenly grandfather who enjoys nothing more than being able to say, "A good time was had by all." This kind of God lets you do whatever feels good and requires little or nothing of you.

Do you really want that kind of God? Not really. That kind of God leaves you in your mess. That kind of God is nothing more than a sappy weakling of one's own imagination, a god who's not big enough to do much of anything about anything.

When you look at Scripture, especially the life and teaching of Jesus, here's the truth you will find:

Jesus loves you just the way you are.

Jesus loves you too much to let you stay the way you are.

Imagine being with Jesus when He walked here on earth. Imagine being right there with Peter, James and John, walking through Galilee, watching Jesus heal the sick and preach to the poor.

Imagine being with Him when He dealt with the religious leaders, cast out demons or spoke in the temple. See Him talk with the woman at the well, or raise Lazarus from the dead.

From all you know about Jesus, can you ever imagine someone coming to Jesus and being turned away, regardless of how sick, poor, or “bad” they were? Jesus refused no one who came seeking His help. No one!

But can you ever imagine someone coming to Jesus and having the impression that his or her sinful behavior could continue? No, no one.

Perhaps the best way to summarize this double truth is how Peter responded when Jesus miraculously filled his fishing net with fish. While falling at Jesus’ feet in worship, Peter cried, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8b). Jesus irresistibly drew people to want to be with Him. And at the same time, His goodness illuminated their own brokenness and sin.

Everything about Jesus called His followers up to a higher level of righteousness—not one defined by any list of religious rules, but one defined by an uncompromising inner heart of integrity and love that was demonstrated consistently in outward behavior.

Yes, Jesus was saying,

You Don’t Have to Live Like This!

One cannot read the whole Bible and escape the reality of God’s holiness. And even if you hesitate to include the Old Testament in building your picture of God, look at how Jesus repeatedly said something like “Sin no more” (John 5:4b). Read how Paul, so often appropriately called the preacher of righteousness by faith, repeatedly calls believers to live “dead to sin” (see Rom. 6:1-2). Read through other New Testament letters about those “sinners” who will not enter the

kingdom of God. Read Revelation about how God will deal in the end with all those who continue in rebellion and sin.

God is love (1 John 4:16). But if we think love is the equivalent of tolerance or pleasant feelings, we are gravely mistaken.

The difference for the follower of Jesus is that *He provides a way for us to change.*

So what does that look like for you and me?

It means you are loved unconditionally, just the way you are.

And it means you dare not become content with the way you are.

Called to Change

We live in a real world with real challenges. Here are just a few of the many implications of this double truth in areas many people wrestle with.

- It means living out holy sexuality: God's view that sex is to be enjoyed within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman, whether in chaste singleness or in faithful marriage.
- It means generous productivity: exerting one's full energy in generating income to provide for one's own needs, the needs of one's family and the needs of others who cannot provide for themselves.
- It means uncompromising integrity: consistently doing what one says and saying what one does, clear as the sunlight.
- It means giving the Holy Spirit full access to deal with anything in one's heart inconsistent with the fruit of the Spirit: things such as envy, unholy anger, bitterness, fear, negativity, anxiety, lust and so on.

God's complete and loving grace means there's nothing you have done or can do that will change His love for you. He truly

loves you unconditionally just the way you are.

And His complete and loving grace means He also relentlessly calls you to become holy like Himself, while working in you from the inside out to re-create you that way.

Is that the kind of God you serve?

I hope so. If not, I encourage you to begin doing so today.

Your Turn: *What has your picture of God been like? Weak? Tolerant? Harsh? Rule-bound? Does this discussion challenge any aspect of your view of God? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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