

Why Shrink-wrapping God Is a Dangerous Concept

“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable are His ways!” (Rom. 11:33).

“These things have you done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was indeed like you” (Ps. 50:21a).

For some reason, at the very time we need God’s great love and power, we keep trying to make Him less than He is. Which is laughable, when you stop to think about it.

This is the God who created the far reaches of this universe with its distances and complexities and components. And we’re going to reduce Him and make Him like one of us? Truly laughable.

Listen to the hasty and shallow prayers we offer up to the God of the universe. We religious professionals develop little mindless speeches which we thoughtlessly send heavenward. You have to wonder if we actually think God in heaven stops what He’s doing to accept that? Does such drivel matter to God, when the words matter so little to those praying them?

Observe the miserly way we serve God, with our stingy offerings and grudging acts. What kind of deity would welcome such? We dishonor and belittle Him by the way we corrupt His commands to make them fit our tiny lives.

Unfortunately, there’s nothing new about the practice. Throughout Scripture, we see people attempting to shrink-wrap God.

- **By the insulting offerings we bring.** In a memorable Old Testament passage, God asked, “Where is my honor? Where

is my respect?" He said, "You priests are despising my name." "And how are we doing that?" asked the holy men. Answer: "When you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? When you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now to your governor! Would he be pleased with you, or accept you? says the Lord of Hosts" (see Mal. 1:6ff).

God was honored by the pittance the poor widow woman brought to the Temple (Mark 12). The Lord Jesus said that while the amount she gave was small, hers was the largest offering that day.

Some offerings honor Him, and others insult Him. Worshipers would do well to find what makes an offering work and what would cause God to reject it.

- **By the insulting lives we live.** Psalm 50 is an amazing bit of Scripture. The people of God were bringing their offerings and going through the proper motions of righteousness. However, something was amiss. The Lord gave them His diagnosis. "You hate instruction, and cast My words behind you. When you see a thief, you are pleased, and have a share in those who commit adultery. You let loose your mouth to evil, and your tongue is bound to deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you accuse your own mother's son. These things have you done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was indeed like you" (Ps. 50:17-21a).

Yes, that's how it happens. God did not speak up when we acted foolishly, and we concluded our sins were acceptable to Him. Poor, sinful humans. We are our own worst enemies sometimes.

Then, the Lord said, "Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: Whoever sacrifices a thank offering glorifies Me and makes a

way; I will show him the salvation of God" (Ps. 50:22-23).

Ordering our lives aright. There is the clue.

- **By the insulting prayers we offer** (See Matt. 6:5ff). Listen to the Pharisee of Luke 18:11b as he prays. "'God, I thank You that I am not like other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I tithe of all that I earn.'" Jesus said the Pharisees "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners, in order to be seen by men." He said they "think that they will be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:7). God is insulted by such self-congratulating, hypocritical praying.
- **By the substitutes we render Him in place of obedience.** King Saul thought he could improve on the Lord's command to execute the Amalekite king. He would bring the man and his entourage into the capital city and make a show of his great victory. God was not impressed. To obey is better than to sacrifice, He said. In fact, rebellion is as the despicable sin of divination or idolatry. In substituting God's command with your own opinion, no matter how highly motivated or well-intentioned, "you have rejected the Word of the Lord." (I Samuel 15:22-23).

Why do we want to diminish God and make Him smaller than He is? The answers are as numerous as the people who do this:

- Maybe to turn Him into a lucky charm? Like Hophni and Phinehas of 1 Sam. 4:4, as they carried the ark of the covenant into battle, thinking this obligated God to give them victory over the Philistines.
- Maybe to allow us to comprehend Him better? If we bring God down to our level, there is no longer any mystery. This is one reason for the oversimplifications of some cult groups.

- Maybe to make Him safe and harmless? See Job chapters 38-42. Does this read like a safe God? In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, little Susan inquires about the lion Aslan, the Jesus figure in C.S. Lewis' stories. "A lion? I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe?" Mr. Beaver replies, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good."

Mark Buchanan wrote an unforgettable book titled *Your God is Too Safe*. He had read J.B. Phillips' book from decades earlier, *Your God is Too Small*. Both are wonderful, and we recommend them.

If He is small, we can manipulate Him and hide our sins from Him (see Is. 40:27). How are we any superior to the idolater? "He cuts down a tree. With half of it, he makes firewood to burn in his oven and feed himself. With half he makes an idol. He falls down before it and worships and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god." (see Is. 44).

How foolish, we think.

And we do the same thing, only we do it with words, by our thoughtless acts and our hypocritical worship. Some of us can recall church members turning God into a clone of themselves, with their racial prejudices, their hatred of certain groups and their pharisaical (i.e., hypocritical) likes and dislikes of various activities.

It happens. God help us.

The Scriptures that call attention to the greatness and majesty of God would fill a small book. In fact, they fill a very large book—the Bible—don't they?

Here's a small sampling:

- "It is He who sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are as grasshoppers," (a).

- “Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens” (Is. 42:5a).
- “Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me” (Is. 43:10).
- “To whom will you liken Me, and make me equal, and compare Me that we may be alike? ... for I am God, and there is no other” (Isa. 46:5, 9b).
- “Thus says the Lord, ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where then is the house that you could build for Me? ... For my hand made all those things” (Isa. 66:1a, b-2a).

Jesus taught His people to begin their prayers with a statement on the greatness of God: “Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (Luke 11:2b).

Therefore ...

Let there be some majesty and mystery in the life of every believer. Let us leave room for God to know more than we (smile, please), to have plans He has not informed us about, to have power we have not even imagined yet (let alone seen displayed) and to be God.

Let the believer demonstrate holiness in his/her personal life. So, even while we “come with confidence to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16a), we “draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools” (Ecclesiastes 5:1b). That passage continues to say, “Do not be quick to speak with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on the earth; therefore may your words be few” (Eccl. 5:2).

Let God be God. And quit trying to make Him a man. {eoa}

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