

The Heart of the Matter

Lesson 2: The Christian's Attitude Toward God

1. A Comprehensive View of God

The mistake of the atheist is not to believe in God at all. Being indifferent toward God, any agreeable attitude of the atheist is only accidental. But the mistake of the believer is to have a one-sided or incomplete view of God. Some stress God's grace to the exclusion of His intolerance of willful disobedience. Others see God only as an exacting taskmaster who can never be satisfied, rather than a loving, patient Father. Yet to others God is merely a reflection of their own attitudes rather than a personal Being with a will of His own.

Thus, one element of spiritual growth is to become acquainted with God's various characteristics and to let those shape our attitudes toward Him.

2. God: Our Creator

When one considers the raw power of God to create "ex nihilo" ("out of nothing" – Heb 11:3); when one ponders the complexity of the universe from the sub-atomic to the galactic level and the knowledge behind its design (Psa. 104:24); when one reflects upon the power to create human personality; then, certain attitudes will be forthcoming from the proper heart.

Humility: *"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?"* (Psa. 8:3-4). All study of the physical universe is merely an attempt to understand what

God has already done. Scientists are constantly discovering new things that stretch their credulity and overturn previous theories and assumptions. Proper regard for the creative power of God should deflate our pride.

Reverence: *"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth ... Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"* (Ps 33:6, 8-9).

The term "fear" carries a powerful, negative connotation in the English language. It may conjure the idea of a

horrible creature from which we must flee in terror. But the fear and reverence we are to have of God is a deep respect that drives us **to** Him and seeks to please Him in every way.

"Do you not fear Me?" says the Lord. 'Will you not

tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it ... but this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; they have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the Lord our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season ..."' (Jer. 5:22-24).

Submission: Judah had no excuse for its defiance and rebellion, for they had witnessed the power of God throughout their history. But the human will has a

phobos: ... reverential fear of God as a controlling motive of the life, in matters spiritual and moral, not a mere fear of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him, a fear which banishes the terror that shrinks from His presence, Rom 8:15, and which influences the disposition and attitude of one whose circumstances are guided by trust in God ... (Vine, Vol. 2, p. 84).

limitless capacity for stubbornness and selfishness. These need to be replaced with submissiveness. Submission is the attitude of compliance, obedience and meekness. It does not look for loopholes; it does not dig its heels in; it does not make excuses. Submissiveness eagerly surrenders to the will of God out of respect for whom and what He is.

“Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” (Heb. 12:9).

3. God: The Source of Our Blessings

In a very real sense, everything good and beneficial to us in this life finds its root in God.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (Jas. 1:17).

“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good ... there is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing” (Psa. 34:8-10).

Everything God created was “good”; i.e., it was properly made to satisfy the purposes of God. From the food we eat to the clothes we wear, from fire that warms us to the stars that inspire us, from medicine to sunlight, from rain to microbes, from mates to gainful labor – all good and honorable blessings are made possible by the planning and provision of God. What, then, should be our attitude toward the One who exercises such great power to our good?

Gratitude: Just as we should exhibit thankfulness toward our fellow man who grants us favor and blessing, so we should be profoundly grateful to God for all He has provided.

Many of the Psalms enjoin thanksgiving. Among them are: 50:12-15; 69:30-33; 100:4-5; 107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31. Likewise the NT exhorts thankfulness: Ph 4:6; 1 Th 5:18; 1 Tim 2:1-3. Constant thankfulness reminds us of how good God is, how fortunate we are to be recipients of His benevolence, and that the good things of life far outweigh the bad.

Confidence: If God has consistently demonstrated such goodness and generosity to man down through the ages, and if we can examine our own lives and see evidence of His benevolence to us, should it not instill confidence in us as we face the uncertainties of the future? We may suffer doubt about many things in life, but we must not allow doubts to arise in our hearts about God’s care for us and His willingness to help us. The truth is that even in our darkest hours, we are surrounded by more blessings than our senses can detect. God is always working behind the scenes to create a path that we can safely tread. Granted, that path may not always take us where we want to go, but we must trust in God’s overriding providence.

4. God: Our Redeemer

The ultimate goodness of God is seen in His redemptive activities spanning the history of time. The entrance of Jesus into the world was not the beginning of the redemptive process, for thousands of years of preparation preceded His coming. God has demonstrated longsuffering, mercy and selflessness in providing a way for us to be saved from our sins. What attitudes should spring from the knowledge that we have been so richly blessed by our Heavenly Father?

Love: While we have not seen God with our eyes or “met” Him in the sense of being in His immediate presence, we can understand what He has done to save our

lives. And we can understand the cost to Him of providing that salvation – the death of His innocent, benevolent Son. There is only one response that is right to such action on our behalf: *“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:30). [Keep in mind, this passage was written long before men completely understood the redemptive purposes of God. How much more should we love God above those who served Him under the Law of Moses, a system of types and shadows?]

It is this deep, abiding love for God that overcomes fear and trepidation (1 John 4:17-18). Even human relationships that are based upon dread, uncertainty and terror aren’t really relationships; they are bondage and misery. God wants us to grow in our love for Him, and the gradual growth of that love displaces fear.

Peace: We are assured time and time again that, having been redeemed from our sins, we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7; Col 1:20). Yet I suspect that many Christians continue to look at God in an adversarial way. Perhaps we see Him as implacable, a taskmaster that cannot be satisfied. We stress His expectations, His rules, His demands, and His punishment of offenders. Certainly God is not someone to be trifled with. But to the responsive soul who respects God, who grieves over his sin, who loves and appreciates righteousness, and who trusts in God for salvation, God is an ally, a friend, a Father.

“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:31-32).

Questions for Discussion

1. Explain this Bible statement: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”
2. How did the Israelites come to view their blessings (Deut. 8:11-17)? How might we repeat this mistake?
3. Cite an example when Jesus offered thanks to God. What does this teach us?
4. Discuss how a Christian might lose his sense of reverence for God.
5. How would you harmonize Matt. 10:28 and 2 Tim. 1:7?