

Knowing God As He Is

By J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

Copyright ©1998 by J. W. Jepson

All rights reserved, including the right to grant the following permission and to prohibit the misuse thereof:

The Author hereby grants permission to reproduce the text of this article, without changes or alterations*, as a ministry, but not for commercial or non-ministry purposes.

***Permission is given for publication of excerpts and condensed versions.**

(first published in The Pentecostal Evangel, November 23, 1980)

In Lemon Cove, California, a Sunday school teacher asked her class of junior boys, "Who is God?"

One eager young fellow responded immediately, "God is a spring bean."

He had heard people refer to God as the Supreme Being, but that majestic title came through to his young mind only as "spring bean."

We chuckle at the boy's artless mistake. Certainly no grown-up would make such a statement. We know who God is.

Or do we? Do we really know who God is, or is our concept of the Almighty only a step or two above the "spring bean" level?

A teenage girl weeps angrily, "Why did God let my grandpa die?"

A godly mother loses a painful battle with cancer, and her son vows bitterly, "If that's the kind of God He is, I don't want to serve Him!"

An agnostic sneers, "If there's a God and He's a God of love, why does He allow so much evil in the world?"

On the other hand, a giggly young coed testifies, "I know God is real because He helped me find a parking space today, and He helps me with my school work 'n' stuff."

A new convert beams, "I know the Lord is with me because things have been going smoothly lately. It's really neat to have God working for me."

An athlete gloats, "I know God answers prayer because I asked Him to help us win the game Friday night, and we did."

Most people have certain concepts of God. Many are not Biblical. Too often people start with themselves--their own feelings, observations, attitudes, experiences--and from there build a personal view of God. The result is a distortion, a caricature. Remember that a *mental* image of God can be just as much a false god as a *metal* image.

God does answer prayer. He does work in our lives. He does make himself real to us in our daily experiences. *But we must avoid the common mistake of forming our concept of God out of the raw material of our own experiences.*

If we are to know the character and attributes of God, we must begin not with ourselves and our experiences but with God's own revelation of himself.

God has revealed himself in His creation. He revealed himself personally in Jesus Christ. And His self-revelation to us is completely and specifically defined in Scripture. That is authoritative. God is exactly what He has revealed himself in the Bible to be.

God desires to be active in our lives. He wants to be what He really is--God of the Bible--in our daily personal experience. If we believe, He will do what He said He will do. We can have what He said we can have.

But for this to happen, we must base our faith on who God is rather than on what happens. Real faith is not the result of answers to prayer. Answers to prayer are the result of real faith.

True, a miracle shows the power and character of God and should lead people to believe. But the believing should not be focused just on the miracle but on God himself whose attributes are demonstrated in the miracle.

The anchor-point of true faith is always the unchanging Word and character of the eternal God. In other words, the bedrock of unshakable faith is not what God *does*, but who He *is*. Once this is settled, we can be certain that in everything He does and allows to be done, God is always acting according to His perfect character. And His perfect moral character is summed up in 1 John 4:16: "God is love."

So even when we cannot understand what God is doing or allowing to be done, our faith remains firmly anchored to the unchanging love of the unchanging God.

We must never suppose, just because Jesus said, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14), that we can force God to our terms. God is not a genie who performs feats of magic at our whim or fancy. If God always fulfilled His promises according to *our* liking, we would be spoiled. We would use the power of Jesus' name to make everything go our way. There would be no testing, no discipline, no growth.

But God is sovereign. He reserves the right to fulfill His promises wisely; that is, in a way that is in perfect harmony with His design for His highest glory and our greatest good.

God is our Heavenly Father. He loves us and wants to draw us into a close relationship with himself. He disciplines us so that we may be "partakers of his holiness"

(Hebrews 12:10). His purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29) and this has priority over every temporal consideration. He knows what it will take to accomplish this in our lives, and the prize is well worth the price.

God is loving, holy, just, merciful, gracious, wise, faithful, and patient. So He has revealed himself, and so He wants us to know Him.

The Bible urges us to thank God for all His blessings. We should never become tired of testifying to what Christ has done for us.

What's more, He desires to give us far more than we have yet received.

Still, our deepest love and devotion to our Lord must flow not from the refreshing springs of what He *does*, but from the fathomless depths of who He *is*.