

Which God?

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The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God. This is taught and emphasized in numerous Scriptures (cf. Deut. 6:4; Isa. 44:6; Eph. 4:6). However, for some (perhaps many) Christians, there are two Gods impacting their thinking. There is the *Creator God* described in the pages of inspired Scripture, and there is the *God created* through misunderstandings and misconceptions, in their mind.

It is possible for a person (even a Christian) to develop false ideas about God. This can happen by taking passages out of context, a lack of consistent and thorough Bible study, or by not reading the Scriptures enough. It can also happen when one allows himself to be influenced by evolutionary or atheistic thinking. Take, for example, these words from the outspoken atheist, Richard Dawkins:

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." (*The God Delusion*).

Sadly, this may be the false view of God that some Christians have in their mind! Without regard to the context, Scriptures such as the following may lead to a false understanding of God:

The Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." (Genesis 6:7)

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. (Deuteronomy 7:1-2)

"Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." (1 Samuel 15:3)

Passages such as these, taken out of context, can leave one with a misunderstanding of the true character of God. God may appear *brutal, cruel, unloving, and unmerciful*. However, when one understands more about the surrounding circumstances of such passages, a picture of God as *loving, merciful, and just* appears.

In the first referenced passage from Genesis 6:7, further study reveals that God gave man one hundred and twenty years to repent (Gen. 6:3). Peter referred to Noah as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). In other words, the ark was not built just for Noah, his family, and the animals. There would have been room on board the ark for any who would have repented.

In the case of Israel entering Canaan, and "utterly destroying" everyone, God had also given the people of that land ample opportunity to repent. When God promised this land to Abram and his descendants, He told the man of faith:

Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Genesis 15:16).

The thought of this passage is that God was giving the people of the land time to repent. In Genesis 15:13 we discover that they had about four hundred years to repent!

Opportunity to repent would also be true in the instructions given to King Saul in First Samuel 15:3. God does not go about randomly exercising punishment on nations and people without first seeking their repentance. He tells Jeremiah:

"At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to

bring on it." (Jeremiah 18:7-8 Emphasis Mine).

We see this truth demonstrated in the case of the prophet Jonah and his instructions to go to the city of Nineveh.

"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." (Jonah 1:2)

Reluctantly, Jonah goes to Nineveh to warn of coming punishment, and to encourage them to repent. As a result of his preaching, the people of the city repented.

*When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then **God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them.** And He did not do it.* (Jonah 3:10 Emphasis Mine).

These examples confirm what the apostle Peter wrote concerning the character of God:

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*** (2 Peter 3:9 Emphasis Mine)

We serve a *loving, merciful, patient, gracious* God, who does not wish for any to die in sin. However, He is also a *just* God. If God never punished evil, He would not be *just* or *loving*.

Richard Dawkins reads passages in the Bible out of context, and seeking to support his disbelief in God, comes to the conclusion that the God of the Bible is "arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction..." However, if criminal evil impacted Mr. Dawkins' life in some way, I dare say he, like everyone else, would want justice. Why do we want justice from civil authorities, when evil acts are perpetuated on the innocent and unsuspecting, but we recoil at the thought that the Creator God would punish evil?

We have seen the false ideas and misunderstandings that some can have of God's character. Notice a few Scriptures which describe His true character:

*"Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, **For You are a gracious and compassionate God. "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness.*** (Nehemiah 9:31-32a Emphasis Mine).

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, **For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*** (Psalm 136:1 Emphasis Mine)

The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

*And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? **No one is good except God alone.*** (Luke 18:19 Emphasis Mine)

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love.** (1 John 4:8 Emphasis Mine)

There are many more passages that could be cited which reveal the truth of God's character. His *loving* and *gracious* character is something everyone has experienced, whether they realize it or not. Jesus said God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). Paul said God "gives to all people life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25).

There is really no denying the *loving, merciful, and just* character of God. Let's all make sure the picture we have of God in our minds, is consistent with the pictures of God, revealed in the whole of Scripture.