

Finding God

The apostle Paul gave the following instruction to some people during his time who obviously believed in a God but did not understand Him or know Him.

Acts 17:23 ... Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ... 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, ...

God, for whom many seek earnestly, is not far from each one of us. Because He is Spirit (John 4:24), He operates under spiritual principles and is not restricted by the limitations of our material world. The verses quoted above tell us that we live in Him and have our being in Him. This is true for all people, Christian and non-Christians. However, even though His presence is so near to all of us and we should know and obey Him, so many of us seem to struggle to draw near to Him and come to know Him better. As Paul says, there are many who claim to have a faith in God but yet worship blindly not really knowing Him.

When we seek God, we cannot approach Him with preconceived ideas about what we believe He should be like. Trying to know God from an earthly framework can mean that we are inclined to place our expectations and limitations on Him and this will always significantly hinder our spiritual life and restrict our spiritual growth. Some of us claim to worship God but do not really know Him and we create or follow doctrines to worship God without understanding who God is and what He requires. God says that this form of worship is in vain.

Matthew 15:8 ` These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. '

God is God and we must approach him with all our heart seeking to discover Him while hungering for Him to reveal Himself to us. This must be done from a position of willingness to humbly accept His will, being obedient to Him, and developing and maintaining a close relationship with Him. When we live like this, we open our life up to receiving His spiritual revelation and blessing.

The focus on the material world is normal for us because we are born into a secular and material world where we are familiar and comfortable with all that involves our five senses, our intellectual capabilities, emotions and the exercise of our will. As we grow up, we are educated almost entirely in the material, earthly realm. We are familiar and generally comfortable with two thirds of our makeup, body and soul, but the key spiritual part is unknown and ignored by most. However God, who we must come to know, is Spirit and He dwells in a spiritual realm.

The spiritual realm sits outside our created world, yet totally saturates it as well. People have compared our world to an empty open bottle immersed in the ocean, the

bottle is surrounded by the ocean yet it is filled by it. The bottle is glass and solid yet the liquid water surrounds it and is able to fill it. This is a reasonable description of our material world that is of a different substance (material and not spiritual) but is surrounded by the spiritual realm and filled with it. To live the life that God intends for us, we must start to recognize the spiritual realm in this way, understand it, and be able to operate in it.

When we seek God the only way to find Him and know Him is in this spiritual realm and we can only communicate with that realm through the spirit within each one of us. For those of us who accept that we have a spirit, many know little about it and do not know how to operate in the spiritual realm. In fact many fear the spiritual realm and are happy to stay away from it. This creates a situation where people try to come to know and interact with a spiritual God without wanting to enter into and operate in the realm where He is. This clearly makes knowing God and drawing near to Him very difficult and for many, impossible.

As a spiritual God, He is supreme, transcending time and space. He exists outside it and beyond it. We can only approach Him according to His conditions and in the way that He permits. God is sovereign in that He is the Creator of all in the material and spiritual realms and determines what will happen. He existed before the creation of the world when there was only a spiritual realm and no material creation, before time started, and He will exist after time draws to a close. This eternal nature of God is stated in the Bible (Psalm 90vs1-2, Isaiah 57vs15).

In coming to know God, we must understand that He is everywhere (omnipresent). Wherever we go and whatever we do as people in this world, God is there. A person cannot hide from God, it is impossible. God, through the spiritual realm, is present everywhere at once.

Psalm139vs7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.

Even though this may be difficult for us to comprehend because of our physical limitations and our inability to come to terms with the spiritual realm, God is in all places at once. No matter where we may go, God is there.

Proverbs15vs3 The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

King David understood God in a way that all people must. We cannot run or hide from God's presence. He knows everything about us, all our thoughts, all our words and all our actions. He is fully aware of the sins we commit (Psalm44vs21, Proverbs5vs21). David speaks of God saying:

Psalm139vs1 O Lord, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. 6 Such knowledge

is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.

We can start to now see that the measures of thought we use on earth limit our ability to comprehend the nature and abilities of God. How can we who only know the steady progression of time and who are limited to experiences in a material realm come to understand God the creator of the universe who is spiritual and exists outside space and time? How can we who must rely on created things and our own discovery and invention understand God who can create a world by the word of His mouth? How can we who live our life in a fleshly body, reliant upon the five senses, even start to understand a spiritual realm that we have little or no understanding of or experience with? How can we who are surrounded by other sinful people and who commit sins daily through our thoughts, words and actions, understand or draw near to a holy God who detests sin and cannot even look upon it? How can we who live in a world of spiritual darkness and sin, comprehend God's world of spiritual light and perfection?

Isaiah55vs8 " For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, " says the Lord. 9 " For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

No person has or ever will come to know God completely in their lifetime. To those who truly hunger to know Him as He is and enter into a spiritual relationship with Him, God's revelation comes spiritually and through a seeking of the heart. For this reason an understanding of God and His will can come relatively easily to a spiritual Christian but be confusing and difficult for someone who is unwilling to approach God from a spiritual perspective. There is a special understanding that will come to the person who is truly a spiritual Christian which will be unavailable to everyone else. God promises to draw near to us as we draw near to Him but this must be done according to the pathway He has determined. In order to gain this spiritual understanding, people must believe in the way God requires them to. Saint Augustine once said that we should first believe and then after believing obtain an understanding.

*Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.*³

Once we believe, God wants us to extend our understanding past the knowledge, wisdom and experiences that we obtain from the world and from a purely intellectual and emotional perspective and commit to a life lived for Him in which He can start to teach us about His spiritual kingdom through a spiritual connection. He desires us to receive spiritual understanding and spiritual wisdom. Because this form of wisdom is completely different to earthly knowledge and understanding, God tells us all to become like little children to learn from Him. We must humbly draw near to God recognizing how much we need to learn and understand.

1Corinthians3vs18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, " He catches the wise in their own craftiness "; 20 and again, " The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.

God has a perfect plan for His created world and people in it. This overall perfect plan will not change to accommodate our wishes or personal preferences. He knows the perfect course to take to achieve the perfect outcome. We must trust God, giving our life to Him to do with as He pleases. As long as we hold back from submitting our life to Him, He is unable to use His wisdom to govern our life. He is unable to instruct and help us by His understanding and plan. We cannot fail if we rely totally on God and yield ourselves to His eternal wisdom, will and purpose. His complete and perfect knowledge of all things means that, when we yield to Him, the perfect spiritual outcome for our lives will eventuate. He knows all that goes before and all that will come after.

We are privileged to have today a far greater revelation of God than has ever been possible. We are able to know God through His creation, through the revelation of Himself in Jesus, by the Holy Spirit who is sent to live within believers and through the spiritually inspired word of God (Old and New Testament Scriptures). There are also numerous books containing people's experiences and understandings of God over hundreds of years. However, even with this great revelation of God, our ability to come to know Him and live the spiritual life He desires seems elusive.

Although we are widely taught and are knowledgeable on a range of subjects in today's world, for most, our knowledge of God and His will is limited to some head knowledge and is generally poor. Much of the knowledge that is obtained does not find its way to the heart so that it can transform our life. Much is choked out of our lives by the busy and self-filled lives we tend to live. A statement made by God in the Old Testament book of the prophet Hosea in relation to spiritual problems experienced by people accurately describes the state of many today.

Hosea 4vs6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

It is ironic that at a time when human knowledge has never been greater, the knowledge of the Christian spiritual life that is essential to live a life that is pleasing to God, is only known by a few. A life lived without a knowledge of the spiritual realm, ignoring our own spiritual nature and not living a spirit directed life will mean that we go to our grave spiritually undeveloped and unprepared. When each of us physically dies, the spiritual part of us, our spirit and soul leaves our physical body, entering into the spiritual realm. We only have one chance to choose to know and be obedient to God and it is during our life on this earth in our physical body. Once we physically die and leave our body, there is no more choice, no further opportunity to know and believe and no opportunity to change our spiritual circumstances. After physical death there is nothing we can think, say or do and there is no bridge we can cross to alter our spiritual position or destination.

We will consider how we should live a spiritual life for God in other teachings but before going further it is important to first gain some understanding of God, ourselves and the relationship between God and people. This understanding must be based on God's revelation over the thousands of years He has interacted with people and which is now available to us in the Bible. We are created in God's likeness and as we come to know God more we will also understand the spiritual environment we live in, understand His will for us and recognize how we can become what He desires us to be.

Three Persons But One God

God over time has revealed Himself as being one God yet made up of three different Persons (Trinity). The first person is God the Father, the second person God the Son (described by the apostle John as being the Word of God at the creation of the world and who came to earth as Jesus Christ) and the third person is God the Holy Spirit.

Though Persons in their own right, they are one God. The Son and the Holy Spirit are sourced from God the Father and continue to be one with Him. The following verses from the Bible clearly distinguish the three Persons.

1John5vs7 For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

Matthew28vs19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ...

2Corinthains13vs14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Genesis1vs26 Then God said, " Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;

The three always act consistently as one there is only one God even though God is made up of three Persons. The following relationships exist between the three Persons of the Trinity.

- The Father is greater than the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- The Father sent the Son and on earth the Son obeyed the Father's will. Jesus said that when we saw Him we saw the Father (John14vs9).
- The Father sent the Holy Spirit to all believers in the Son. The Holy Spirit obeys the will of the Father as well as that of the Son. The Holy Spirit was the power for creation and He provided the power for the Son when He lived on earth.

Jesus Christ said that the Father was greater than He was (John14vs28). He also said that the Father had sent Him and that the Holy Spirit would come after He asked the Father. The Father told Jesus what to say when He was on earth and Jesus said that authority was handed to Him by the Father. Jesus also said that only the Father knew when certain events would occur.

Even though the Father is greater, Jesus and the Father in a spiritual sense are yet one. Jesus is in the Father, yet the Father is also in Jesus (John14vs11). The Holy Spirit is a person in His own right, He was sent by the Father yet He is one with the Father and Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to live in Christians, yet in Him coming, the presence of God the Father and Jesus are also present. We will always see Jesus and the Holy Spirit acting consistently in accordance with the character of God the Father.

God the Father is the source of all creation and all creation, including each of us,

spiritually exists in Him. As the source of creation, God is the one who breathes life into our lifeless physical body and the one who gives each person a spirit.

Isaiah42vs5 Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it.

When Jesus was born into this world, we see in Him for the first time a human being who lives a life in the complete knowledge of His Father's will, who is wholly obedient to that will, is free from sin and who is able to call God His Father. In the gospel of John he clearly teaches us that the Word was with God before the creation of this world and that the Word was made flesh (Jesus). John describes Jesus as a light that came to shine in a dark world but the world rejected Him even though it was created through Him.

John1vs1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ... 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ... 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In His prayer to the Father, recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus prays to be glorified with the glory that He had with the Father before the world was created. At the time of creation, Jesus existed as being one with God and as the person who would one day take on human form and provide a means for each of us to be reconciled to God (John17vs4-5). Later Paul confirms in his letter to the Colossians that the Word was with God at creation and that the world was created by Him, through Him and for Him. He existed with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit at creation as God the Word (Colossions1vs 15-17). Again in Hebrews we read that God made the world through Jesus (Hebrews1vs2,10).

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity and was also with God the Father at the creation of the world. He was the spiritual power of God at creation.

Genesis1vs1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The Holy Spirit is also the one who has come to God's chosen people over thousands of years to reveal God and to empower particular individuals to serve God. It was He who inspired the writers of the Bible to ensure that God's revelation would be safely carried over time to all people. It was also He who inspired the true prophets who spoke to the nation of Israel. When Jesus was about to die He said that the Holy Spirit would be sent to His disciples and this would be even better than His own physical presence with them.

We now start to appreciate that when the visible (material) world was created, God the Father created it by, through and for the Word (Jesus) in the presence and through the power of His Holy Spirit. In this way the entire Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) were involved in creation. God created out of the spiritual realm the material realm that we live in and experience through our physical bodies. What is seen was created by what is unseen and spiritual.

Hebrews 11vs3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

3. Augustine, 354-430, Bishop of Hippo 396-430.

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