

The Importance of Knowing God
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In October 1977, in the town of Lake Arthur, New Mexico, Maria Rubio was rolling up a burrito for her husband Eduardo's breakfast, when she noticed that the skillet burns on the tortilla resembled the face of Jesus.

She showed it to her husband and he agreed that Jesus' face was burnt into the tortilla. Needless to say, Eduardo went hungry that meal as Maria told family and neighbors of the miraculous event.

Maria took the tortilla to have it blessed by her priest. She testified that the tortilla had changed her life, and her husband agreed that she had been a happier, more peaceful and submissive wife since the tortilla had arrived.

After the reluctant priest blessed the tortilla, Maria took it home, put it in a glass case with cotton to make it look like it was floating on clouds, built an altar for it and opened the "Shrine of the Miracle Tortilla" to visitors.

Within a few months more than 8000 people made pilgrimages to worship at the shrine. Everyone agreed that the burn marks on the tortilla looked like Jesus, except for one anti-religious reporter who thought it looked like former heavyweight boxer Leon Spinks.

Maria eventually quit her job as a maid to attend full-time to the shrine in her home. She moved it to a small wooden shed in the backyard. By 1979, over 35,000 people had visited, bringing flowers and photos of sick loved ones. But years of southwestern heat literally refried the tortilla until the image disappeared. In 2005, Mrs. Rubio's granddaughter took the Miracle Tortilla into school for Show and Tell, and it was dropped and broken! The shrine has been closed and the remains retired to a drawer in the Rubio's home.

This true story shows the importance of having the right concept of God. An image of God – whether intentionally painted or randomly created by a skillet – has no power and is not to be worshipped. The Bible expressly forbids worshipping any image of God. This shows why knowing God is of vital importance – it will determine the way we live. How we view God affects everything else in our lives.

We are in a sermon series called Knowing God.

The most important thing about you is what you believe about God!

1- Knowing God is important because it determines where you live in eternity and it determines how you live on earth.

John 17:3 says:

This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

Knowing God is of vital importance – it impacts every other area of your life on earth AND more importantly, your eternal destiny. How we view God affects everything else in our lives.

Knowing God is also important because as we saw last week:

- 2- The more you know God – the more spiritually strong you will be**
- 3- When we know God we will tell others about Him.**
- 4- The more you know God – the more you will trust Him.**
- 5- The more you know God – the more you will obey Him**
- 6- Knowing God is important because a wrong view of God can result in idolatry.**

Why? Webster's Dictionary defines idol as an image of a god, used as an object or instrument of worship. And an image of God is not really God. 1 John 5:20-21 says:

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true - even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

These verses almost seem like they don't go together. In one verse John's talking about knowing God and eternal life – the next verse he simply says – Keep yourselves from idols. How do these go together? Without knowing God and having a right view of who He is – we can end up in idolatry.

Let me ask you this – where does idolatry begin? In the mind. How you think about God is so important because if your concept of God is not the true and living God – you may end up with an imaginary God – or worse yet – an idol – a false God with no life and no power.

You'll end up in a shed in somebody's backyard worshipping a tortilla!

A.W. Tozer said that idolatry is worshiping a god other than the one true God.

The premise of my message today is this – Jesus Christ is the true and living God – if you want to know what God is like you must look at Jesus. If you want to worship the true and living God – your worship must be Christ centered.

There's a right concept of God and many wrong concepts of God. Unfortunately many people have a wrong view of God.

Some people don't even believe in God. By the way – atheists are people of faith. What do I mean by that? Atheism involves a logical fallacy known as a universal negative. This means that a person would have to be omniscient and omnipresent to be able to say "there is no God" from his own pool of knowledge. Only someone capable of being in all places at the same time - with a perfect knowledge of all that is in the universe - can make such a statement based on the facts. In other words, a person would have to be God to say there is no God!

Therefore, atheism is logically indefensible. Although the atheist would say, "Prove there is a God," they cannot prove there is no God. So, it takes faith to NOT believe in God, just as it takes faith to believe in God. In fact, I think it takes lots more faith to not believe in God because of all the evidence for God.

We saw last week that God makes Himself known through:
Creation – Conscience – The Holy Spirit – The Word of God – Jesus Christ

Even so – some people choose to believe there is no God or they have the wrong concept of God.

There are several sources of the wrong concept of God:

The enemy – from the beginning Satan has tried to cast doubt on God – Hath God Said?

Others – the current concept of God is anything you want him, her or it to be – just make one up

Self – What we choose to believe from all these sources and from our life experiences.

As we walk through life, painful things happen. Maybe a prayer is not answered like we thought it should be. A dream goes unfulfilled and we get discouraged. Somebody does us wrong. That can make us think, "Where was God when that happened? Doesn't He care?"

Have painful experiences impacted your view of God?

Religious experiences can affect our view of God. One of the worst is legalistic, controlling churches. They can instill in us a view of God as a behavior inspector who is never pleased with us. Has religion given you a wrong view of God?

Lastly, family relationships greatly impact our view of God. Our relationship with our parents shapes our image of self and God. Children need to be loved, encouraged, disciplined, protected, provided for, and supported. When these needs are met – people are more likely to have a right view of God. However, when these needs are not met, a person may go through life looking to get them met, not even aware that they are looking for love in all the wrong places. They don't go to God because their view of Him is all wrong.

Some people relate easily to God as father because they had loving parents. Regardless of how your father treated you, God is the perfect loving Father and no earthly father can love us like Him. There are no perfect parents – no one perfectly models God to their children – but there is a vast difference between being raised by a father who loves you and one who abuses you.

My wife Deborah was abused by her step father – verbally and physically. He beat her down with his words and his actions. That greatly impacted her view of God. It took years of renewing her mind and emotional healing for her to be really able to trust God.

My dad was loving – but often distant or even gone – traveling in the ministry. I knew he loved me, but we weren't really close. That impacted my view of God. I have never doubted God's love, but I had to work through thinking He was distant or unavailable.

How has your family relationships impacted your view of God? If we are not aware of how family contributes greatly to our view of God - we can end up with wrong concepts of God that stunt our spiritual lives.

Wrong Concepts of God

God is an absentee Father –

If you had no father in the home – or if your father was there - but uninvolved – you might tend to see God as distant. “He's too busy for me or He doesn't really care.” This will impact your worship and your prayer. It's hard to express love and devotion to someone you're not sure cares or is paying attention.

God is hard to please –

Maybe your parents were hard to please. Your grades were never good enough. If you got a C – why not a B? If you got all A's and 1 B- they focused on the B.

When you did a job around the house – they criticized it. No matter what you did – it was never good enough. When that happens – you can end up viewing God as hard to please. No matter what you do – it’s never good enough. You live under condemnation. Take it a step further...

God is a mean dictator –

Matthew 25:24-25 tell the Parable of the talents –

Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

This man had a view of God as harsh and mean. His wrong belief about God led to wrong actions toward God. I had to deal with this when I was younger. I had a wrong fear that if I totally gave it all to God – if I totally submitted 100% to Him – He would do something terrible to test me – like having a major illness or one of my kids getting hurt.

This is a pretty common concept of God – but it’s wrong. It would be like my son coming to me when he was at home and saying, “Dad, I love you and want to obey you totally.” And then me saying back – “Oh yeah? We’ll see about that. I’m going to take away your allowance and give you more work to do and hit you for no reason on a regular basis and we’ll see just how committed you are.” Would I do that? NO! I would want to bless my son. How much more does God want to bless us!!

See how my concept of God hindered my relationship with Him? It kept me from giving myself to him 100% without reservation.

Some people go to the other extreme and think:

God is like Santa Claus –

“He should always give me what I want when I want it. I just sit in His lap and tell Him what I want and poof! It appears.”

Years ago we knew a couple who were gave sacrificially to everyone and everything for years. Then one day we went sailing with them on Grapevine Lake. To our amazement they began to rail against God. "God isn't who He says He is. We've been giving faithfully for years and God hasn't given us that car we believed for. As a matter of fact, He hasn't given us the house we asked for either.”

Today they are divorced and have renounced God. The only reason they gave was to receive – it was not an act of worship. When God was not their Santa Claus – giving them what they wanted when they wanted – they turned on Him. Their view of God was wrong. Closely related to this –

God will keep me from all problems

Another couple at a church we attended was over the area of missions and traveled worldwide. Whenever the doors of the church were open, they were there. They were a devoted couple. Then all of a sudden their marriage fell apart. There were actually years of marriage problems – and when the husband didn't change – the wife just left. She falsely believed that if she did everything she was supposed to do God would change her husband and she would be free of problems. Neither one of them now serve the Lord. Their view of God was wrong.

Please understand why knowing God is so important!

7- The wrong concept of God will not sustain you in the long run.

With the wrong concept of God – you will end up shipwrecked in your faith. A false god cannot sustain you! That's why it's so important to have the right concept of God!

So how do we put away wrong concepts of God?

- Recognize it - Does our view of God line up with the word of God?
- Renew your mind with the word of God
- Replace the wrong concept with the right concept of God

I've talked about the wrong concept of God, now I want to share about the right concept of God. There is only one right concept of God. There are many wrong concepts – but one and only one right one. In John 14:6-11 Jesus said:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work. Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

Can't you hear the sadness in what Jesus is saying?

Don't you know me by know? What is God like? Like Jesus!

Colossians 1:15-20 reveals seven unique characteristics of Jesus Christ.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

If you want to know what God is like fully – look at Jesus Christ. All God's fullness dwells in Him. Hebrews 1:3 says:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.

Jesus gives us a total and exact representation of God. If your God is different than Jesus, you've got the wrong God. In fact, you've got a god who is not really god at all.

So what is the truth about Jesus? We know Jesus Christ is the only begotten son of God who came to earth – lived a sinless life – died for our sins – was raised from the dead – ascended into heaven where He lives to intercede for you and me. Hebrews 13:8 says:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The very next verse says:

Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.

What are those strange teachings? A different Jesus. A Jesus who has changed from the Jesus of the New Testament. A Jesus who is not the same today as He was yesterday. But the Bible says Jesus does not change. Whatever He did in Bible days, He does now.

If He saved then, He saves now.

If He healed then, He heals now.

If He set people free then, He sets people free now.

If He baptized in the Holy Spirit then, He baptizes in the Holy Spirit now.

If He did miracles then, He does miracles now.

He does not change! He still loves.

He is still the friend of sinners. He is still full of grace and truth.

Too many people are trying to make the Word of God fit their lack of experience rather than making their experience line up with God's Word.

People try to explain away the lack of supernatural power in their lives by saying God has changed, but God never changes.

So - Don't try to change the unchangeable.

Don't try to replace the irreplaceable.

Don't try to end the eternal.

Instead focus on knowing God through the Word and through Jesus.

So the ultimate test of your view of God is this: Is your God Jesus Christ?

And the next question is – Do you really know Him? Not just know about Him, do you know Him?

He is the true and living God and the only way to be saved.

Do you know Jesus and are you trusting in Him alone for eternal life?