

Do You Have a Wrong Concept of God?

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How do you view God? Everybody has different ideas about what God is like. Some people see Him as the one who causes all the tragedies that happen. Others see Him as distant and far away, who doesn't seem to care about what's going on in their lives. And others see Him as someone who deeply cares about all that happens to them.

I'll say some names and I want you think about how you view them. Adolf Hitler. Pee Wee Herman. Jerry Seinfeld. Billy Graham. Osama Bin Laden. Mother Teresa. Nick Saban. Vladimir Putin. God.

As I mentioned those names, you had an opinion come to your mind, based on the information you've received about them. Your concept of them may or may not be correct. In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable about some slaves who had very different views of the same master:

“For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.” (Matthew 25:14-15)

A talent wasn't the ability to tap-dance or juggle. It was a bag of gold coins weighing about 90 pounds. Notice it says the master distributed the money to each according to their ability. The fact is that some people are more intelligent and gifted than others. They are “five-talent” people, so God gives them more responsibilities to handle. Others are “two-talent” or “one-talent” people—but all are **equally valuable** in God's sight.

God isn't going to give the heavy responsibilities designated for a five-talent person to a two-talent person. He's only going to give you what you can handle. So stop coveting the people with more talents! They might have more gifting than you, but they also have more responsibility.

“Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.” (Matt. 25:16-18).

Two of the slaves took the money and doubled it, probably by buying seed, planting it, and harvesting it. But the third slave didn't do anything with it. Instead, he took the money and buried it in the ground until the master returned.

“Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things,

I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.
(Matthew 25:19-23)

When the master returned from his journey he evaluated their work. The slave with 5 talents doubled his money and the slave with 2 talents doubled his money—and they both received the same praise and reward from the master. Although we're not told exactly what their rewards were, we do know it was something very good because it says it would bring them great joy. This, of course, represents the judgment day. We are the slaves in this parable and we're working with what God has given us until either He returns or we die. But now let's look at the one-talent guy.

“And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no *seed*. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’” (Matt. 25:24-25)

The one who buried his one talent dug it up and gave it back to him. Why did he bury his talent when the two other slaves didn't? It was because he had a distorted view of his master.

He had a **wrong view of his master's character** because he saw him as a hard person to get along with. “I knew you to be a hard man.” Today he'd probably say, “*You don't listen to anybody. You're hard-headed and unbending. You're a jerk!*”

The slave also had a **wrong view of his master's motives**. He thought his master as greedy. He said, “You reap where you didn't sow, and you gather where you scattered no seed.” In other words, “*You're just using me to make yourself rich.*”

And so he went out and buried the money his master had entrusted him with. He's thinking, “*I'm not about to go out there and work my tail off just so my boss can get rich. I don't like him and I'm not going to let him manipulate me for one second. I'm going to bury the money and when he gets back, I'm going to hand it to him and say, 'Here, you gave it to me—and now I'm giving it back to you.'*”

The one-talent slave had a totally warped view of his boss. The master didn't give the money to his slaves to manage just so he could get rich. He was a good master and had generously rewarded the first two slaves for their work. But the one-talent slave wrongly viewed him as a bad boss and that's why he buried his talent.

HERE'S THE LESSON FROM THIS PARABLE: **Everything we do FOR God is based upon our concept OF God**. The way the slaves viewed their master determined how they worked for him. Two of the slaves had a correct view of him (that he was a kind man and a generous man), so they were glad to work for him. But the one slave had an incorrect, distorted view of him, so he didn't want to lift a finger for him. And this is why so many people who don't want anything to do with God. They have a totally wrong concept of who He is and what He wants from us.

We don't necessarily act upon what is true, but upon what we believe to be true. John Alexander in his book *The Warrior's Edge* talks about “reality maps.” A reality map is the way a person views his world. Years ago sailors would sail along the coast line because their maps told them the sea was filled with monsters. They also believed the world was flat and if they went too far away from the coast they would fall over the edge. Of course, we know that's not true but they believed it was true. They acted on what they believed to be true and not what was actually true.

This is why our concept of God is so important. We will react to Him out of what we think He's like. If we see Him as a cruel God, we won't have anything to do with Him. But if we see Him as a good God, we'll want to know more about Him and want to serve Him.

How Does a Person's Concept of God Get Distorted?

1. Satan misrepresents God. Satan and demons were once angels in heaven that were kicked out for rebelling against God. Their entire mission is to influence people to turn against the Lord. He does two things to keep people away from God. First he misrepresents God and second he misrepresents himself. He makes God look like the bad guy and himself look like the good guy.

When Satan tempted Eve he told her, "God is withholding good things from you. The forbidden fruit is good, and God doesn't want you to have it." He tried to make God look like the bad guy.

Have you ever had someone slander you? A person who hates you will lie about you, and **the person who hears the slanderous accusation will form a wrong opinion about you.** You've been misrepresented because someone lied about you.

Second Corinthians 11:14 says "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." A disguise is a misrepresentation. A disguise makes someone look differently than he really is. Satan disguises himself because that's the way he can deceive people.

2. When a tragedy happens and God gets blamed.

It's amazing how quickly people get angry at God and blame Him whenever something bad happens. Remember, Satan caused several tragedies in Job's life—and then Job's wife tried to pin the blame on God. She said, "Curse God and die." Even though the devil caused the tragedy, God got blamed for it.

When a tragedy occurs, **we usually don't stop believing in God, but we might stop believing in the goodness of God.** This poisons our faith and gives us a distorted view of Him. Many, many people form a wrong theology about God based on a bad experience, probably because they think He should stop all evil. But the fact is, evil is going to exist in our world until He comes back and sets up His kingdom. It's not right to blame God when something bad happens. Evil people and the evil one are usually the ones to blame.

3. When a person is taught wrongly about God.

The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus told them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures or the power of God." (Matt. 22:29) Many people have been taught things about God that simply aren't true. People are told wrong information about God through liberal pastors in churches, social media, movies, and schools. The Pharisees taught people in the synagogues a completely wrong concept of God. Jesus called them "a brood of vipers" (Matt. 12:34, 23:33) because they were misrepresenting God. When Jesus explained the correct view of God, the Pharisees plotted to put Him to death.

4. When people claim to be Christians but don't act like it.

Nothing distorts a person's concept of God quicker than when a person who claims to be a Christian doesn't practice what he preaches. Satan uses hypocrites in the church to keep people away from God. People who see the hypocrites will say, "*If that's what God is like, I don't want any part of Him.*"

A farmer went into town to get a haircut. He brought an apple with him from his orchard to give to the barber. The barber took a bite and said, "This is the most delicious apple that I've ever eaten. Where did you get it?" The farmer replied, "I grew it in my orchard. You can come out and pick as many apples as want. Just call me first and I'll take you out there."

A couple of weeks later, the barber was driving by the farmer's orchard and remembered his offer to let him pick apples. He got out of his car and picked an apple. He took a bite and it was the most bitter apple he had ever tasted. He went to another tree, grabbed an apple, and it too was sour. He tried one more tree and it was no different.

When the farmer came back to get a haircut, the barber said, "I stopped by your orchard and picked some apples, but they were all bitter and not sweet like the one you brought me."

The farmer said, "Remember, I told you to call me first? I planted bitter apple trees along to road because people kept stopping and stealing my apples. Once they taste my bitter apples, they never come back. The sweet apples are planted further away from the road."

Satan uses this tactic to keep people away from God. He plants bitter, hypocritical church-goers along the road to keep people from discovering the goodness of God. Unbelievers are turned off by them and say, "If that's what God is like, I don't want any part of Him!" The unbelievers never go deep enough in their search for God to find out what He is really like.

Just make sure you're sampling the Lord and not a bitter apple that's pretending to be sweet. Once you're tasted of the true God, you'll know if your heart that He really is good.

How Do We Obtain the Correct View of God?

First, we must deprogram our minds from the wrong concept.

First Thessalonians 5:21 says "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good." He's saying to examine everything that you believe and let go of the wrong beliefs. Eat the meat and spit out the bones. Everybody has some wrong ideas about God. If you have an idea in your mind that's incorrect, you've got to get the wrong idea out before you can embrace the new idea.

For centuries, people believed Aristotle's opinion that the heavier the object, the faster it would fall to earth. In 1589, Galileo challenged Aristotle's idea. Galileo went to the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa and dropped a 10-pound weight and a 1-pound weight at the same time, and they both landed at the same instant.

Did you know that some people in that day refused to accept the truth about gravity? They wouldn't let go of the wrong idea they believed. To embrace the reality of God, we must de-program ourselves from the wrong concept.

Some people believe God can't do miracles today. That's a wrong idea.

Some people believe God hates them. That's a wrong idea.

Some people believe God causes all tragedies. That's a wrong idea.

We must renounce wrong beliefs if we expect to change our concept of God.

Second, we must reprogram our minds with the right concept of God.

Jesus came to reveal God to us. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. God is a good God. Luke 6:38 "[God] is kind to ungrateful and evil men." Hebrews 11:6 says

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God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Why would you diligently seek God if you believed He was a bad God? No, you seek Him because you believe that He's a good God.

David said, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

First he says to **taste**. Tasting is an invitation to try something.

I'm sure you have gone to a mall with a food court. Do you know how Chick-Fil-A advertises? They send a person walking around with free samples of their food on toothpicks. People choose whether or not to taste the free samples. But Chick-Fil-A has found that if they can get a person to taste their food, then he or she will probably eat there.

Tasting has to be done by each person individually. I can't accurately describe how something tastes because my words can't do it adequately. The only way you will know what something tastes like is if you taste it for yourself.

Second, David says see that the **Lord is good**. Notice the order: first you must taste, and then you'll see. Seeing means to have your spiritual eyes opened so that you personally experience something.

God is good but if we are blind we can't see it. We must have our eyes opened in order to see and experience God's goodness.

First we taste. Then we see. Finally we trust. We trust that the Lord is good and that He wants the very best for us.

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