

# *Meditate on These Things*

Meditate: (v)to focus one's thoughts on;  
to reflect or ponder over.

*Who is God?*

No. 5

## WHO IS GOD?

How do we prove, or disprove, the existence of God?

I left the farm and went off to college where I was informed authoritatively that evolution was the answer, not Jesus. I next entered the Army and learned there that the only place where God mattered was in the foxhole. After the Army, graduate school presented a secularization and specialization of science, philosophy, and all things that mattered, and God was effectively ignored or treated with indifference. Then medical school was the ultimate affront to God. We had everything under control, and if He was needed, we would let Him know.

In each of these paradigms, I encountered multiple thoughts as to the character, identity, even the very

existence of God. Discussions were invariably unfruitful in convincing these individuals to think other than they had already determined to be their truth.

It seems that the proper approach to establishing any theology should be to start with a discussion about God. But there are difficulties with this as a starting point, since "god" can be quite ambiguous and mean any number of things. "Life after death" and "supernatural" are also difficult starting points.

The familiar sentence, "God cannot be proved," while true, is misleading and dishonest. People taking this position are careful to avoid the truth that absolute proof is not possible anywhere else. Readers are left to conclude, erroneously, that items of Christian faith are without support while items in fields of science or philosophy have the value of certainty. A

few quotes follow to illustrate the problem faced.

"In order to express the historical Jesus of Nazareth, the New Testament writers had to use mythological language of pre-existence, incarnation, ascent and descent, miraculous intervention, resurrection, and so on which now makes sense only if viewed as a now completely antiquated world-view."  
[Bultmann - Robinson 24]

"Considering the achievements of science and technology, it is now considered that we are in an age of the autonomy of man in which he has, in our time, reached a certain completion. Man has learned to cope with all the questions of importance (by learning all the laws by which the world lives and manages in science, social and political affairs,

art, ethics, and religion), without recourse to God as a working hypothesis." [Bonhoeffer, 1960]

"In this world 'come of age', the god hypothesis is no longer of any pragmatic value for the interpretation or comprehension of nature, and indeed often stands in the way of better and truer interpretation." [Julian Huxley, 1960]

How do we engage such persons in a discussion about God? We require a place to start which is both concrete and meaningful, that is, start with what we know. Science is abstract, Jesus is concrete. No one denies that Jesus lived and died, just that he was resurrected. While there are many secular writers who will deny the existence of God, and several theologians who cannot unite on the being and nature of God, there is a

practical basis of unity in Christian commitment. There are several who will espouse a belief in Christ as one who lived and was a great teacher but insist that He was not divine, a worker of miracles, a healer, nor was He resurrected.

The Christian is a person who becomes convinced that the truth of Jesus Christ is the only trustworthy basis of life itself. If we are committed to Him, we trust Him about the being and the character of God, about the reality of prayer, about the possibility of miracles, and about the life everlasting. Only one who has never read the gospels can deny these facts about Christ, for they literally bristle with supernatural claims on the part of Jesus.

Archimedes, inventor of the lever and the pulley, said that, given a place to stand, he could move the earth. His only condition was that the fulcrum had to be

firm. The Christian believes he has a place to stand, that Jesus Christ is his Archimedean fulcrum, the central focus of his life. To say that Christ is the fulcrum is not merely to say that He was the greatest figure of history or the finest moral teacher. It is, instead, to see Him as the genuine revelation of the mystery of existence. And this necessitates commitment, a passionate involvement in His life, teachings, death, and resurrection.

We should never cease to be thankful for the writing and preserving of the four gospels that tell us of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man. Modern day scholars of the Greek and Hebrew language make confident assertions as to which part of the Gospel record is original and which were added as a result of the needs and experiences of the early

church. They are claiming more than any man actually knows.

Perhaps the chief incentive for the production and preservation of accounts of what Christ did and said and suffered was that early Christians, many of whom were Greek, desired to know the objective and historical truth about His appearing. The gospels are the response of those who knew.

The members of the early church wanted to know more about Christ because they believed that He was the image of God the Father. Though they could not see God they could see His image in Christ, and they wanted to learn more about that image.

They took great pains to know Christ, because, facing the facts of His life, they had concluded that He was indeed the

very brightness of God's own glory and the express image of God's person.

Hebrews 1:3 Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

We are suggesting an approach now which stresses the Christ-likeness of God. The question now becomes, "What is God

like?" Is God a mere impersonal force? Is God merely a Ground of Being? Is God vindictive and uncaring? Or is God like Jesus Christ? Jesus Himself answers this last question in the affirmative. And if this answer is true, this is really wonderful news. A Christian, however imperfect he may be, is a believer, and *this* is what he believes.

The Old Testament gives us much information about the character of God. Exodus 34:5-7 concerns the LORD answering the request of Moses to 'see' Him: "Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means

clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Notice we learn nothing about the actual appearance of God. Majesty and Glory are His, but His image is seen only in the characteristics revealed - merciful; gracious; longsuffering; goodness; truth; just.

These qualities of character are assigned to Christ prophetically in Isaiah 11:1-5

"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD,

And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist."

Then we go to the New Testament and find many that reflect these qualities as the character and teaching of Christ (Sermon On The Mount, Matthew 5-7), and the writings of the Apostles, such as:

"Galatians 5:22-25 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-

control; against such things there is no law."

Jesus planted in all men a radically new idea: that the central mark of greatness is service (Luke 22:25-27). Jesus elevated the ideal of service, saying "I am among you as the one who serves." Matthew 20:28; "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Humility had been mentioned, but the combination of humility and service, illustrated by the washing of the disciple's feet, was new. Apart from Christ, we probably would never have understood the association of humility and service as a mark of greatness.

The very idea of this provides us with some understanding of the Maker of heaven and earth. What if the Eternal Mind, underlying all reality, were indeed

the Suffering Servant, with the spirit of a little child? The astounding revelation is that this is true.

How do we know it is true? Speculation and abstract reasoning provides no answer. That is why we should talk about Christ before we talk about God. Reasoning is abstract, but Jesus Christ is concrete, and His life, teaching, death, and resurrection is the best documented story.

Thus, the remarkable and odd consequence is that, when we talk of Christ, almost our only intellectual resource is a story. The Christian, when challenged, merely tells the story again, because that is all there is to do. Elton Trueblood told the story like this:

*"Once, during the days when the Roman Empire was very powerful, there was a man from Galilee who lived in such a*

*manner that those who knew Him best became convinced that His life represented a unique revelation of the living God. In harmony with what He said of Himself, they concluded that, since He could not be accounted for by ordinary canons of judgment, He represented a divine breakthrough into history. This One was no imperial Caesar, no hero of romance, no respected philosopher. He spent His youth in a carpenter's shop; He lived His days in the greatest possible simplicity; He forgathered with the sick rather than with those who were whole; He was the instrument of healing for many who suffered from physical diseases as well as those whose troubles were primarily spiritual. He unabashedly claimed to present accurately and authentically the "Character of God."*

*He unhesitatingly announced the forgiveness of sins, a fact which was of*

*great importance in that He moved more among sinners than among righteous men. His career was marked by self-spending rather than self-saving and this continued through His death, which was that of a public criminal. After death He appeared in both a bodily and a spiritual manner to a great many people whose lives were consequently revolutionized."*

So, let us go back to our original question. How do we talk with unbelievers about God? To believe in Christ is to believe that God is like Him, and that is to believe that suffering love rather than sheer power stands at the center of all reality. To believe in Christ is to be convinced that suffering and long-suffering love constitute the very pillars upon which the universe is built. And since there is no other one to whom we may turn, the only alternative to anyone who will not accept Christ as the fulcrum is to

have no fulcrum. We must operate in our lives from a solid point, the fulcrum must be firm.

To convince others concerning the solid point, we can only ask them to first look at the story, and second, demonstrate in our own life the power and compassion that come by operating from this solid point. Look first at what Christ did in His life on earth, and look again at what He has done among men since His glorification.

Consider Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. Saul said it was the living Christ that met him, and his changed life is evidence of that encounter with Christ. Then consider the character of that change as evidenced by his epistles. Consider also the changed lives of the disciples who abandoned Christ at His crucifixion, but preached with boldness

after Pentecost and their empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, in this manner, by the example of a changed and obedient life, Christ is glorified, God is identified, and evil men are convicted. It is by ignorance of the truth that they continue to deny. We are not arguing with them, we are only confessing our conviction and devotion to our Maker and Redeemer.

When Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:16, "But we have the mind of Christ." This means that Christ can be in us, that His very mentality comes to dominate ours. "Do you not realize," asks Paul, "that Jesus Christ is in you?" The central purpose of the gospel is that Christ may be formed in us (Galatians 4:19) and that He may dwell in our hearts (Ephesians 3:17).