

God, The Father
St. Matthew 6:5-15

Having previously focused on Jesus as our source of authority in all things religious, we now turn to the next logical topic. The concept of God has been upon the minds of men and women in all ages and across all cultures. One of the most commonly asked questions is, "Does God exist?" Particularly with regard to the terrible tragedy that befell our nation on September 11, 2001, many individuals wondered how God could allow such acts to occur. We must keep in mind that throughout the ages of history there have been tragic events, this is not something unique to our culture.

We are also aware that throughout the course of history there have been atheists who denied that God existed at all, agnostics who wondered if we could understand God, and pagans who worshipped just about anything as God. In more recent history we find a fascinating comparison between atheism and belief in God played out during the Cold War days of the 1960's. The Soviet Union was the first nation into space. When their cosmonauts entered orbit they looked around and proudly proclaimed that God did not exist because they had not seen Him. This event was followed by astronauts from the United States who went into orbit and proudly read the account of creation from the book of Genesis.

Christians certainly believe that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth". But, what does Jesus teach us about God that is essential to the Christian faith? What is it about His teaching that differs from all of the other attempts to define God?

If we examine the passage in St. Matthew (6:5-15) that contains what is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer", we find certain concepts and ideas about God that

are unique. In teaching prior to the prayer Jesus said that God sees in secret but rewards openly (verse 6) and that God knows what we need before we ask (verse 8).

Beginning with the words, "Our Father" (verse 9) we begin to see a completely new concept of God. He is the Father. This is not like other religions in the world and certainly not like any other previous attempt to define and conceive of God. Jesus tells us that God is to be hallowed; this means that we are to think of Him as holy, pure, and consecrated. We are to venerate the reality of God. Heaven is said to be where God resides (verse 9), not on the Earth like the limitless multitudes of false gods that mankind has bowed down to.

Jesus further explains that God has a kingdom and a will to be done both on Earth and in heaven. This begins to explain the Christian belief that God has certain properties. As God He is believed to be omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (everywhere). Jesus explains we are to understand God in all of these ways. God resides in heaven but has a will here upon Earth. His will is to be done. He is not restricted to a certain time or place like the false idols of heathen worship. These false idols are made out of wood or stone while the true God is a Spirit (John 4:24).

Other attributes of God are found in this passage. Jesus said that God will provide for all of our daily needs (verse 11) and that He will forgive our debts (verse 12). What is interesting about this idea of God forgiving our debts is that Jesus said it is conditional upon our forgiving our debtors. If we recall that God created man in His own image, there must be somewhat of God in us. God simply treats us the way we treat others. Since we are created in the image of God we must understand the nature of God. He is willing to forgive our debts, but we must be like Him and forgive others. We find also an

indication of the omnipotence of God in verse 13 where Jesus asks that God lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. As Christians we should gain great strength from the knowledge that God will protect us from the powers of Satan.

Throughout this prayer, Jesus emphasized the concept of God as "The Father". This was a completely new concept of God in the history of the world. God has been worshipped by humans in all ages and by all cultures. The Native Americans believed in "The Great Spirit" and saw the presence of God in the beauties of nature. People in all ages have looked up to the stars and realized there was a higher power. In the time of the Second World War the United States established military bases and airfields on many remote South Pacific islands. On one particular island the natives were confronted by something they had never seen before, an airplane. They had no concept of what an airplane was, all they knew is that it came from the sky and appeared to have magical powers. When the war ended and the military forces left the islands these natives constructed a model of an airplane using palm trees and other naturally occurring materials. They then worshipped this image because it represented something that was higher than they were.

The Christian cannot satisfy his belief on the world's teachers or the practices of the past. There are too many rites and ceremonies that have been devised by man in order to worship God. In the attempt to come to grips with the concept of a higher power, mankind has developed numerous ideas and rituals. We must allow Jesus to give our answers.

In the Old Testament God was known by many names, but never as "Our Father". In other religions God is known by various names, but never as "Our Father". The

religion of Islam manifests a belief in "Allah" and many people seem to think that this concept is as good as the Christian concept of God, The Father. In light of what Jesus teaches I do not believe this can be. Allah is pictured in the Koran as all-powerful and all-knowing, but never as a father. Allah will do good only to those who follow him and will do evil to those who anger him. This is not the God of the bible! This is not the picture of "God, The Father". For those who believe that one God is as good as another I must respectfully disagree. There is no similarity between the Allah of Islam and God, The Father of true religion including Christianity.

But who is the Father as Jesus revealed Him? To answer this question we need to look once again at the misconception of God that has been prevalent throughout the history of mankind. The Apostle Paul in his preaching to the inhabitants of Athens (Acts 17: 22-31) brings out several salient points. Paul proclaims that God made the world and everything in it. Since God is the creator of all He has no need to dwell in temples made with the hands of His creation (verse 24). God cannot be worshipped through the creations and imaginations of man. Man cannot make anything that God needs; in fact, mankind owes the very breath of life to God (verse 25). God has predetermined the times and preappointed the boundaries of His creation (verse 26). Why has God done these things? As Paul explains, "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" (verse 27).

We are in many ways like the untold generations before us. We do not appreciate the fact that God is our Father. Paul said that we should seek, grope, and find God yet he also said God is not far from each one of us. Jesus had a unique relationship with God.

Since He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man, Jesus can explain things about God and reveal His nearness.

Jesus proclaimed, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). Since Jesus occupies such a unique place in human history, both as the Son of God and the Son of man, we should allow Him to teach us of the special relationship we can have with God, Our Father.

Jesus taught that God loves the Son and shows Him all things. God has also put judgment into the hands of the Son (John 5:17-23; 5:26-30). Jesus claimed that the Father had testified of Him and that He had come in His Father's name (John 5:36-44). Jesus said that God had set His seal upon Him and that we must believe in Him whom God sent (John 6:27-29). Certainly Jesus spoke of a close relationship with God.

As Jesus continued His message to the people recorded in John chapter 6, He began to focus on topics that were interpreted as "hard sayings" (verse 60) and which led to many of His disciples turning their backs on Him (verse 66). What were some of those topics? In verses 32-40 Jesus likens himself to the manna that God gave the children of Israel in the wilderness. He says that it is God that gives mankind the true bread from heaven (Jesus). Jesus emphasizes once again that God has sent Him and reiterates the fact that if we believe in Him we can have everlasting life and the hope of the resurrection.

Again, in John 6:53-58 Jesus speaks one of those "hard sayings". He declares that unless we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood we have no life in us. Since He has already shown that He is the bread of life (verse 35) and has already shown that God has given mankind the true bread (verses 32-33) we know who He is talking about. This is a clear allusion to the Lord's Supper. As disciples of Christ we have an

opportunity to remember His death upon the first day of the week when we gather around the communion table. The bread represents His body, the fruit of the vine represents His blood (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). We have a solemn obligation to keep the Lord's Supper because of the words of Jesus, "He who eats this bread will live forever" (verse 58). This type of close relationship with God is only possible in Christianity.

Following these hard sayings that caused many of His disciples to turn back and follow Him no more, Jesus continued teaching about God the Father in John 8:14-19. He clearly stated, "I am with the Father who sent Me" (verse 16). He asserted that the Father has borne witness of Him (verse 18) and that if people would know Jesus they would also know the Father (verse 19). In verse 29, Jesus repeats His claim that the Father sent Him. These events are clearly portrayed in the account of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13). In John 8:54-55 Jesus again states concerning the Father, "but I know Him".

Jesus referred to His imminent crucifixion on several occasions. In John 10:15-18 He clearly reveals that His resurrection was a commandment given to Him by the Father. We have the hope of eternal life because of what Jesus did for us on Calvary. We must understand that it was the Father who required it. It is very poignant to read the last words of Jesus before He died, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). It is no wonder that Jesus could say "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). It is because of this close relationship that we have security as believers in Jesus. As the Lord teaches, "no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:25-29). Certainly Jesus reveals God in a unique way.

Jesus taught many other things concerning the Father, things dealing with love (John 15:9-10), obedience and salvation (John 17:1-5), and unity (John 17:20-21). But, perhaps the most readily understood teaching about God is revealed in that well-known passage of John 3:16-17 where we see that all of these things Jesus has spoken of were motivated by the love of God--Our Father!