

Two Pictures of God

by Timothy R. Jennings, M.D.

Recently my 11 year old nephew and 14 year old niece, who have not been raised in any church, attended church. Afterwards they both told me that the preacher presented a god that scared them, one, if true, they would never want to believe in. They said to my wife, "the preacher described a different god than uncle Tim teaches."

Do you think Jesus would be happy if we present Him in such a way that the children would not want to be with Him or know Him? Do you think something is wrong if, when we talk about God, we frighten the little children?

When Jesus was on earth He said, "if you've seen me you've seen the Father" (John 14:9). And what attitude did the little children have toward Jesus? The children were not afraid of Jesus, but loved to be in His presence (Matt 19:14, 21:15, Mark 10:14-16). I love this description from one of the founders of my church:

Our Saviour awed men by his purity and elevated morality, while his love and gentle benignity inspired them with enthusiasm. The poorest and humblest were not afraid to approach him; even little children were attracted to him. They loved to climb upon his lap and to kiss that pensive face, benignant with love. - Gospel Worker 92 pg 261

Jesus would have the fathers and mothers teach their children this beauty of character. He would have them teach their children that God loves them, that their natures may be changed, and brought into harmony with God. **Do not teach your children that God does not love them when they do wrong; teach them that he loves them so that it grieves his Spirit to see them in transgression, because he knows they are doing injury to their souls. Do not terrify your children by telling them of the wrath of God, but rather seek to impress them with his unspeakable love and goodness, and thus let the glory of the Lord be revealed before them.** - BEcho, February 1, 1892 par. 9

When you hear two different views on God's character how do you know which is true? Should we look for miracles and signs that accompany the message? Miraculous signs are not reliable evidence, because miracles can be counterfeited (remember a talking serpent). The best approach is to examine the facts, the concepts, the ideas put forth and compare them with scripture and other evidences God has provided.

A few questions that might help in discerning truth from error:

- If God is the source of all truth and Satan is the father of lies, who would not want us to use reason to examine the evidence and truth? Who would want to put forth ideas like, we need to rely on faith and not reason? Remember God is the one who invited us to "come let us reason together though your sins are as scarlet they will be white as snow." (Isa 1:18).
- What should we fear, our loving God who gave His Son to save us (John 3:16), who was in the Son reconciling the world to Himself (2Cor 5:19), who is for us (Romans 8:31), or should we fear sin which is destroying us? Is there something wrong with a presentation that incites us to be more afraid of God, who is trying to save us, than sin which is destroying us?
- Will God violate His character of love? Can love exist in an atmosphere without freedom? God certainly has the power to make us robots, but if He did what would happen to love? God has the power to threaten and coerce, "love me or I will kill you" but if He did what would happen to love? Concepts which destroy love are not in harmony with God's character!

One of the founders of our church made a list of explicit lies Satan has told about God, explicit distortions of God's character. In my searching of scripture I find this list and her description to be quite accurate. If we find preachers today making the same arguments as God's ancient enemy, using the same words Satan did, what should we do?

Christ came to save fallen man, and Satan with fiercest wrath met him on the field of conflict...Satan sought to intercept every ray of light from the throne of God. He sought to cast his shadow across the earth, that men might lose the true views of God's character, and that the knowledge of God might become extinct in the earth. He had caused truth of vital importance to be so mingled with error that it had lost its significance. The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, **and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary.** He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. **The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God.** Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. **The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes.** That men might have salvation he came directly to man, and became a partaker of his nature. - Signs of the Times, January 20, 1890

Satan's representations against the government of God, and his defense of those who sided with him, were a

constant accusation against God. His murmurings and complaints were groundless; and yet God allowed him to work out his theory. God could have destroyed Satan and all his sympathizers as easily as one can pick up a pebble and cast it to the earth. **But by so doing he would have given a precedent for the exercise of force. All the compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. He would not work on this line. He would not give the slightest encouragement for any human being to set himself up as God over another human being, feeling at liberty to cause him physical or mental suffering. This principle is wholly of Satan's creation.**

The principles of the character of God were the foundation of the education constantly kept before the heavenly angels. **These principles were goodness, mercy, and love. Self-evidencing light was to be recognized and freely accepted by all who occupied positions of trust and power.** They must accept God's principles, and, through the presentation of truth and righteousness, convince all who were in his service. **This was the only power to be used. Force must never come in. All who thought that their position gave them power to command their fellow beings, and control conscience, must be deprived of their position; for this is not God's plan.**

These principles are to be the foundation of education in God's church today. The rules given by him are to be observed and respected. God has enjoined this. His government is moral. Nothing is to be done by compulsion. Truth is to be the prevailing power. All service is to be done willingly, and for the love of God. All who are honored with positions of influence are to represent God; for when officiating, they are in the place of God. In everything their actions must correspond to the importance of their position. **The higher the position the more distinctly will self-sacrifice be revealed if they are fit for the office.** Every heart that is controlled by these principles will be loyal. **But when those who profess to be in God's service resort to accusation, they are adopting Satan's principles to cast out Satan;** and this never will work...

Today **Satan is working upon human minds by his crooked principles.** These will be adopted and acted upon by some who claim to be loyal and true to God's government. **How shall we know that they are disloyal and untrue?--"By their fruits ye shall know them." God does not force any one. He leaves all free to choose.** But he says, "By their fruits ye shall know them." The Lord will not write as wise those who cannot distinguish between a tree that bears thorn-berries and a tree that bears olives. - Review and Herald, September 7, 1897 par. 7-9, 15

In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. **Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan;** and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice. - Desire of Ages, pg 761

The Bible tells us that the war we are in is a war for our minds centering on the truth about God. We are to "demolish everything that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2Cor 10:5), because when we retain lies about God our minds become "futile, depraved and darkened" (Romans 1:18-31). Not only does the Bible teach this, but brain science confirms it. When we worship a God of love, our anterior cingulate cortex (the part of the brain where we experience love, compassion, empathy) grows and results in calming of our amygdala (the part of the brain which causes fear and anxiety). Perfect love does cast out fear! But every other god concept results in worsening fear and no growth in the anterior cingulate cortex! This means those who worship a wrathful god get a damaged brain and are less capable of love!

What is the final message which is to go to the world to lighten it for Christ's return? Is it a picture of a wrathful, angry, revengeful deity? Or is it something entirely different?

"It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy and truth...**The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is the revelation of His character of love.**" - Christ's Object Lessons, pg 415

The truth about God's character of love is the center with which all other truth must align. Examine the picture of God you hear at church; then compare it with the life of Jesus and Satan's allegations against God, which picture of God is being presented? It is time, time for God's people everywhere to stand up and proclaim the truth about Him, time for us to reject the lies, time for us to take the final message of mercy to the world! Won't you reject the lies and stand up and proclaim the truth about Him?