

Life With God

God

The Bible assumes God's existence and, in general, never seeks to defend this assumption. The Bible's position is that creation and conscience make God's existence apparent to all men. However, the Bible does use much of its text to describe the nature of God. One of the earliest pictures the Bible gives of God is as Creator. God has created all things including men. The fact that God made all men is loaded with implications. For example, if a potter made a pot, then it is only reasonable that the potter determines the purpose for the pot's existence. He has this right because He is its Creator. In the same way, God has the right to define man's purpose, and has reasonable expectation that men would live in light of the purposes and ethical standards He has given.

In Jeremiah 9:24 God says, "I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight". God was under no obligation to make men, to be a personal God Who is interested in their lives, or to give men a purpose for which to live. God demonstrates His love in that He freely chose to do all three. Though the Bible is clear that God is love, it is equally clear that He is not only love. God is also just, and according to Jeremiah 9, He delights in being so. Men see justice as a noble quality. Few would declare a judge to be a good judge if he let the guilty go unpunished. Certainly, there are many who know of corrupt judges, and some have even been their victims. In contrast to this, God promises to be perfectly just: He will never let the guilty go unpunished (Exodus 34:6-8)

Man

Earlier we said that, just as the potter makes the pot for his purposes, God has made man for His purposes. Part of this purpose is summed up by Jesus in Matthew 5:48 when He says, "Be perfect, therefore as your Heavenly Father is perfect." God made us to be like Him. His expectation is that man's actions, words, motives, desires, and thoughts would be just like His own. However, the Bible is emphatic in its declaration that all men have failed to accomplish this purpose. If people are honest they would agree that their failure to do what God commands is not simply accidental, but that they often know that they are about to do wrong and nevertheless do it. In other words, their disobedience is intentional. God has made us for Himself and His purposes, but we have rejected Him and His purposes. To love any part of God's creation more than God is sin, and to reduce God to any role in our lives other than King is sin as well.

Many people feel that God understands that they will "mess up" from time to time. This is true in the sense that God does understand why men sin, but it is not true that man's sin is ever okay with God. God views this as rebellion and because God is personal, He sees this as personal rebellion against Him. God uses personal language

in the Bible to describe how men have treated Him. He says that men have rebelled against Him, grieved Him, detested Him, rejected Him, and despised His words. In light of how God feels about man's sin, one asks the next logical questions – what does God intend to do about it?

God's Response

How do most people predict another's response to a situation? Take, for example, a little boy who sees his dad as a cruel man because of the way he has treated him, his siblings, and others in the past. If that boy accidentally puts a hole in the window with a baseball, he has reason to expect severe punishment and verbal abuse from his dad. The boy's expectation is based upon the cruel nature of his dad. A boy who deemed his dad to be loving, gracious, and understanding would expect an entirely different reaction from his dad in similar circumstances. The little boy expects his dad to respond according to his dad's character.

Likewise, God responds to our sins according to His character. Because God had promised to be just and never to let the guilty go unpunished, we know that we cannot simply be pardoned. Pardon is the excusing of an offense without exacting a penalty, and would be a miscarriage of justice. However, if God gave everyone everywhere the just punishment they deserve, He would be fair, but would not be demonstrating His rich mercy and kindness. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God sent His Son to earth to die of the cross for sinful people, which is an overwhelming gracious and merciful act. In the forgiveness He offers people through His Son's death, God remains just because He pours out His wrath on Christ. Therefore, God does not pardon sinners but truly forgives them! God's response is a perfect response that flows from His perfect love and justice. Jesus' work on the cross was a perfect work, in that He did all that was necessary to accomplish complete salvation from our sin and God's wrath. It is as if the entire world has a deadly disease and God has given us a miraculous cure, Jesus.

Our Response – Receive Christ

Since Jesus is the complete cure for our sin disease, many wonder why all people aren't going to heaven. The answer is straightforward. Imagine a man who had a terminal illness and received a call from his doctor one afternoon. The doctor had great news, he had recently discovered a cure for the man's dreadful disease. Would that news cure the man? No. Would greater knowledge about the drug that had been developed cure the man? No. Would seeing the drug with his "own two eyes" cure the man? Absolutely not! He has to receive the drug. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God." The reason that all people are not going to heaven is that they will not receive Christ, their only possible cure.

So the question is, how does one receive Christ? The answer is simple, the same way they would receive anyone – as they are. If a dad goes to visit his son at college, does the son cut off his dad's hair before he lets his dad into his dorm room? Maybe he would denounce him as his dad and say that he can only enter as a friend, but not as his dad. That would be absurd! Nor does he force his dad to remove his coat, hair, or tie. He receives his dad into his room just as he is. Likewise, we receive Christ into our lives as He is, the Savior of our souls and the Lord of our lives. If Jesus were not Savior and Lord, He would not require us to receive Him as such. However, as Christ stands at the door of a person's life, He does so as the Savior of the World (1 John 4:14) and the Lord of all (Colossians 1:16). Therefore, when a person seeks to reduce Jesus to something less, they are not receiving the true Jesus, but some imitation of their own making. It would be similar to taking some potion they developed from spices in their kitchen, calling it penicillin, and expecting it to cure their strep throat. Because the disease is real, I need the real cure. Jesus is the real cure and so not we must ask, what does it mean to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Receiving Christ as Savior

Suppose you were on a flight to London with a close friend. Your friend gave his luggage to the airline as the two of you entered the airport, and planned to pick it up at the baggage claim when you arrived in London. You, however, knew of many airlines that had lost people's luggage and were thus unwilling to let your luggage out of your sight. Therefore, you took your luggage onto the plane and put it under your seat and over your head. When you arrived in London your luggage was missing as well as that of your friend. Here is the question, which of the two of you would the airline reimburse? The one who trusted them with their luggage! Because you never entrusted your luggage to them, they would not assume the responsibility for it.

All people are entrusting their sin problem to someone or something. For many, it is their moral lifestyle, church attendance, community service, or general kindness. To receive Christ into my life as Savior means that I reject putting any of my trust or confidence in something other than Christ's death on the cross to save me from my sins. In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul says, "I know Whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him." Paul trusted Jesus and the work Jesus did on the cross to save him from God's wrath. We must also.

Receiving Christ as Lord

Let's say you went to visit a friend of yours to spend the weekend at his new house. Imagine further that your friend had designed, built, and bought this new house himself. What would it be like if you said to him, "Tomorrow I don't want anyone to go upstairs, to go in the kitchen area, or to turn on the television." The problem with this scenario is that the house is not yours, and therefore you have no right to rule over it. Your friend is

the rightful master of the house and thus, would not tolerate being treated as your servant.

Our life is like a house with many rooms. There is the room of money, sports, the opposite sex, our future, etc. Jesus both designed and built the house of your life. Through His death on the cross, He bought your life as well. His intention is to be the master or ruler of it. He wants to do as He pleases in any of those rooms that represent different aspects of your life. To receive Christ as Lord is to step off the throne of your life and surrender control by letting the rightful master rule. This is something that takes place internally, as 1 Peter 3:15 says, "But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord." Though there are many aspects to a person's life, there is only one throne, and Jesus says it is rightfully His. In Matthew 6:24 He says, "No one can serve two masters. Either He will hate the one and love the other, or He will be devoted to the one and despise the other. One Bible Dictionary sums it up like this, "the whole proclamation of Jesus is a proclamation of unconditional turning to God and an unconditional turning from all that is against God... It calls for total surrender and total commitment to the will of God." This is not to say that you are committing to be perfect, but you are making a willful decision to bow your knee to a new King with the intent to follow Him.

Where do Good Works fit in?

That is what it means to receive Christ. We trust Him to save us from our sin and we surrender our lives to His control. Doing good works has not been a part of this, and many wonder where they fit in. The reason this question is common is that many have grown up operating according to this equation:

Receiving Christ + Doing good works = Salvation
(going to heaven)

The idea is that if they will trust Christ and work hard enough to please God then they will go to heaven. But, if they fail to work hard enough then they will not go to heaven. Thus, some of their trust is in Jesus, but some of their trust is also in the good works they have performed. This is not correct. Doing good works is not part of what will save a person's soul. The above equation should be replaced by the following:

Receiving Christ = Salvation + Doing good works

Here, if one truly receives Christ as we described above, two things are a by-product. First, they will be forgiven of their sins and become a Christian. Second, good works will necessarily begin to pour forth from their lives. If good works are not a by-product of their decision, something is wrong. It is like a massive explosion. The tremendous noise that is associated with a large explosion is not a part of what made the explosion happen. However, if you never hear the noise, you know that the explosion failed to

occur. Receiving Jesus takes place in the heart and is enough for salvation. However, there should be outward signs of what actually happened internally.

By taking God's wrath upon Himself, Christ has provided for us the only means of receiving God's forgiveness. Receiving Christ as our Savior and our Lord is the only acceptable response to what Jesus has done. Have you received Christ? If not, why not?