



"This is how men get to know God—by doing His will."
—Henry Drummond

29-Dec-17

A God of Many Dimensions

Perhaps the most critical question in every nation and every era is "Who is the true [God](#)?" In his final book, *Mystery of the Ages*, Herbert W. Armstrong titled the chapter explaining the first mystery, "Who and What Is God?" He rightly called it a mystery because, as religious as many people claim to be, true knowledge of the true God has been hidden from [the world](#) (see [Matthew 13:10-17](#), for example). Most people, if asked either of these vital questions, believe they have a fairly good handle on the answer, but beyond a general response, they express little real understanding of the Eternal God.

Respondents with some biblical literacy may quote various verses like "God is [love](#)" ([1 John 4:8](#), 16) or "God created the heavens and the earth" ([Genesis 1:1](#)). These answers are accurate and useful starting points but a bit unoriginal. Any kind of one-dimensional view of God—whether it be as the Giver of grace, Provider, Healer, even Savior—does not do Him justice.

Some perhaps, reaching deep into their scriptural memory, might come up with God's self-description in [Exodus 34:6-7](#):

And the LORD passed before [[Moses](#)] 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."

This may be a far better answer to the question even than quoting the [fruit of the Spirit](#) ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)) or pointing to the Love Chapter (I Corinthians 13), though both of those sections of Scripture can add tremendously to our understanding of God. [Exodus 34:6-7](#) uniquely presents God as a divine Being with—as a carnal human being would understand it—both "light" and "dark" sides. As God Himself puts it to Moses, He is "merciful and gracious" yet "by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children."

God, then, possesses "soft" virtues, which most Christian churches proclaim loudly and often, with special emphasis on love, and "hard" ones, which get little attention, if any. Yet, the Bible reveals God as having a range of character traits: God loves—and hates. He makes peace—and war. He shows mercy—and demands justice. He showers some with kindness—and pours out on others His fury. He blesses the obedient—and curses sinners. Showing their humanity, most professing believers tend to emphasize God's softer attributes in relation to themselves, and if they acknowledge His harder edges at all, they apply them to His dealings with others.

This far broader perception of God is vital to our understanding of primary biblical truths. For instance, the God of the Bible says without apology in [Malachi 1:2-3](#), "Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness." The God who states this so frankly is decidedly different from the caricature that is often taught in Sunday School classes or featured in religious greeting cards. His words here do not make Him sound nice at all, perhaps terrifying and even a bit capricious.

However, should a person think that God reveals a character flaw in loving Jacob and hating Esau, he would be wrong. The apostle Paul expands on God's statement in detail in [Romans 9:13-29](#) (see also [Romans 2:1-11](#)), where he asks, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" and answers with authority, "Certainly not!" ([Romans 9:14](#)). He explains the principle in verse

18, "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills, He hardens." In other words, God is sovereign over His creation and can do with people as He pleases to bring about His purpose. To Israel, God is a kind and loving Master, but to [Edom](#), He is wrath and destruction.

God is far more complicated than most people imagine. This lack of imagination is all the more puzzling when we consider that the same God is [Jesus Christ](#) in the New Testament. The gospels, which of all sections of the Bible the public knows best, reveal Him to be a multifaceted individual. Yet to so many He is "Gentle Jesus, [Meek](#) and Mild," probably because people so often think of Him as a baby in a manger scene at Christmastime rather than as the Son of Man, a Prophet, and a King.

Jesus certainly says in [Matthew 11:29](#), "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." But He also shouts at the Pharisees, "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of [hell](#)?" ([Matthew 23:32-33](#)). This same Man took up little children into His arms and blessed them ([Mark 10:16](#)), and with those same arms, He took up a whip and drove the money changers from the Temple ([John 2:15](#)).

We do ourselves a grave disservice when we try to define God too narrowly. Granted, He is far too complex for our finite minds to understand fully, yet we err in lurching to the opposite extreme by characterizing Him too simplistically. When we do so, we often confine Him to what we can comprehend: ourselves. In our minds, God becomes just a somewhat greater human: limited, contained, tamable. He warns us against this in [Psalm 50:21](#): "These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes."

This verse hints at what happens within our minds when we limit God in this way. Since we think God is a lot like us—well, perhaps a little greater—we believe that He acts and reacts like us. Soon, we begin to suppose that He did not really mean it when He told us not to do this or that—and even if He did, He would not mind if we do it once or twice, as long as we do not make it a habit. It is not long before we have convinced ourselves that the forbidden

behavior can be done as long as we ask God to forgive us of it later. He will always forgive, right? Is that not what a loving Father does? In time, we, like Israel of old, are in full rebellion against God and His way of life—and it starts with thinking too little of the Almighty Lord of all things.

This is what Israel did in the wilderness, as [Psalm 78:41](#) attests: "Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel." Thinking of this, the author of Hebrews writes in [Hebrews 3:17](#), "Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?" The Bible draws a straight line between limiting God and death.

As mentioned earlier, our minds are too finite to comprehend God fully. How, then, should we think about God? As well as we can, we must grasp that God is holy—other, pure, transcendent. He is everything the Bible reveals Him to be and infinitely greater. If we keep this in mind, we will walk in humility before Him and submit to His Word ([Isaiah 66:2](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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[How Big Is God?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

We must not have a one-dimensional perspective of God, for there are multi-faceted aspects of His personality and His vast works. Our puny minds can only grasp a tiny sliver of what God really is. Far less than a toddler to an adult is our understanding compared to God's. As a meticulous micro-manager of His universe, calling every star by name, numbering every sparrow and every hair upon our head, God is active in every aspect of creation, including scrutinizing every detail of our lives. We desperately need to bring to our lives a sense of awe of the Creator, coupled with a sense of our own humility—grateful for His creative work in us, transforming us from maggots to members of His family.

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by Earl L. Henn

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