

WHO IS GOD?

The theme for CBC's first quarter preaching is about God. It is a worthy pursuit to begin a new year. To serve God effectively, we need to know everything possible about who He is in order to do the right thing in the right way in His eyes. So, who is God in your mind? The Bible has a lot to say about God. There are about 15,000 references of God in the Bible. Most of them describe the perceptions of who God is by people from their interactions with Him. That's the reason for having 20 or more names of God in the OT. (Examples: Yahweh Shalom-the Lord is peace; El-Shaddai-God Almighty...)

We can learn a lot of God from these Bible passages: God is sovereign, mighty, powerful, wise, pre-existence, loving, just.... Even with all this information, we still do not have a full understanding of who God is. So, what else can we do to find out more on who God is? As I was praying for God's direction on this question, a thought came up in my mind: let's see what God Himself has said on who He is. This is what I will share with you today.

Who did God say who He is in the Bible? These are some of the verses I came up with:

- Exodus 3:14. In answering Moses's question, God said, "I AM WHO I AM...", which means He is the eternal existent One, not a created being like we are. If He were created, he could not help us anymore than we could help others.
- Exodus 20:2. Just before God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments, He spoke, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt..." Here, God identified who He was in His relationship with His covenant people, the Israelites.
- Exodus 34:1-7 (We read the passage during the prayer meeting. I will print only verse 6 and 7 for this email.)
⁶ "And he (God) passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness., ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished..."

In vs.6 and first part of vs. 7, God made it very clear that He is a loving, gracious benevolent God, but what was He saying in the last part of vs. 7? Who would be the "guilty" ones?

If He forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin, who are the guilty ones? The answer is people with unforgiven sins. And who are they? They are the unrepentant with unforgiving sins. To save a lot of talking, let's speed forward to what Jesus said in John 3:16-18. (Please read on your own) Jesus clearly said that while God desires to save everyone (vs.16, 17), for those who do not believe in what God has done in and through Jesus in providing forgiveness for their sins are condemned already (vs.18) and will receive God's wrath in judgement at the last day.

Now, according to Exodus 34:6-7, who did God say who He is? IN A NUTSHELL, God said on one hand He is the loving benevolent God who is willing to sacrifice His only Son for our sins, and on the other hand He is the Just God who will not let the guilty (the unrepentant) to go free. FOR ME, GOD DEFINES WHO HE IS by the terms of His moral character that He proclaimed in Exodus 34:6-7.

My question is, "Why on this occasion just before God wrote down the Ten Commandments the second time for His chosen people that God introduced Himself the way He did rather than by reminding Moses and people of Israel of His supreme authority and power?"

Here is what I think: Most people, even today, look at the Ten Commandment as a listing of do's and don'ts from the Sovereign authoritative God which demands our absolute obedience.

But, I do not believe that's God's motive for giving us the Ten Commandments. Based on what He has said of Himself in Exodus 34:6, God's motive is to provide us the guideline for a moral life that is beneficial to us and pleasing to Him. The Ten Commandments are like the white line marking the edge of the road on a mountain path to serve as a warning to keep us from falling over the cliff.

CONCLUSION

Over my long years as a Christian, I notice there is always a tension between BEING AND DOING as a Christian in our walk of faith with Christ. Let me be clear on that we cannot be a Christian and not be doing Christian work and services in the name of Christ. The tension is caused by whether on Being or Doing that we place our emphasis on. Let see what we may learn from what God said in Exodus 34:6-7.

I believe God introduced Himself the way He did before He inscribed the Ten Commandments on the tablets is to emphasize that He put importance on BEING who He proclaimed to be over what He can or has done. In other words, God is showing us that everything He has done, is doing, and will do is from the OUT FLOWING of who He proclaimed to be. Let me explain. Most of us believe that God is Sovereign which leads us to believe that He could do anything He wishes and answering to no one. Is that true? If it is, He is an unrestrained deity like all other humanistic gods—a tyrant, a bully. No. No. God does have to answer to someone. He has to answer to Himself—on who He proclaimed who He is. God put self-restraint on Himself in what He does because He is BEING who He said who He is. If not, He is not the God He proclaimed to be in Exodus 34, and He cannot be trusted or believed in.

That is why God said in Malachi 3:6, "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendant of Jacob are not destroyed" even though they repeatedly disobeyed and sinned against Him. Other examples given on this point: Psalm 23:3, "He restores my soul. He leads me in the path of righteousness FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE." Psalm 106:8 "Yet He saved them (Israel) for HIS NAME'S SAKE... In spite of their continuing disobedience. (IN OT the name of a person stands for who he proclaimed who he is.)

APPLICATION

A. For us personally. Since we conclude that whatever God commands/instructs us to do, or allows us to go through certain situations that we do not understand or able to handle, is from the outflowing of His character He proclaimed in Exodus 34:6-7; therefore, we can completely trust that He always has our best interest in His heart. We can trust in Him and depend on Him even in the dark moments of our lives. Knowing this, may you have a peaceful and a blessed 2021 in your personal life and be confident that you are indeed in GOOD HANDS, God's hands.

B. For us as His servants. As God's servants, we need to discharge our ministries, work and services the way God does His that is to benefit the ones whom God entrusts us to lead, minister, or serve. Let what we do be the outflowing of who we profess to be — disciples of Christ (clones of Christ. The word Christian means "little Christ") exhibiting Christ's character (God's character) described in Exodus 34:6-7 as a way to glorify Him.

C. Adopt a new perspective for serving God. Ask ourselves the question, "If God created heaven and earth without our help, why does He want us to serve Him?" A simple answer for me is this, "On the job training"— not only training to work better, but more importantly, training to become a Christ-like person through the ministry, work or service God has given us. Ask ourselves the question, "Have I become a better person (son or daughter) and a more effective servant in God's eye in and by what He calls us to do?"