

WHAT IS YOUR PICTURE OF GOD?

The reason I thought I would ask this question of all of us this evening, is because the way in which we picture God affects our faith and how we live it every day. There are special seasons in the church year that give us time to pause, reflect, realize, repent, and renew ourselves and more importantly our relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ .

Advent is another such time in the church year when there is the emphasis on coming into relationship with the newborn Jesus and growing with Him.

We begin Lent tonight, a solemn journey that leads to that triumphant day we call Easter. How will we live out those forty days in between? Will we do nothing yet expect something? Or will we take the opportunity of Lent to draw closer in relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ?

By doing so Lent will come alive for us. In Communion we will expect and sense His presence. We will take up the cross and know in spirit that which Christ did for each and every one of us!!! Down the spiritual road we will be refreshed and renewed by the power of Easter – His Resurrection, able to be that witness of faith, and draw people to God and His Son Jesus Christ through us.

However it all goes back to that question I began with tonight. What is your picture of God? There are many “pictures” of God, many depending on our experiences. Right or wrong these are perceptions we have developed. But if we seek in Lent the true nature of God, we will see more clearly and enrich our relationship with Him.

There are some basics to our foundation we must have before we begin to develop this picture of God. For us as disciples God is real, basic, yes, but if He is not then how do we have any type of relationship with someone who is not real? How can we answer the question, “is He real?”

God revealed Himself to us in the form of His Son Jesus Christ . In John 14:9 “Jesus replied, *“have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father! So why are you asking Me to show Him to you?”*

One last big part of the foundation is, God is personal. In John 14:23 Jesus said *“anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching. My father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”*, Sounds very personal to me. To develop a lasting relationship with someone they certainly have to be real. We have to know them, by them revealing themselves and the relationship if it is going anywhere must be personal.

Once a relationship has been established we begin to get a picture of the other person in the relationship. Of course over time we can for various reasons get the picture all wrong, and may find a difficult time redrawing the picture. Sadly we may even sever the relationship because of these misconceptions.

Our picture of God can be misconceptions too. Likely many of us viewed god as young children in Sunday School as an enforcer and fear was a major motivation for our obedience. We grew older and our fear may have lessened and we pictured God as that presence that was there to spoil our “fun. Growing into adulthood, possibly marriage and family we viewed God over our shoulder ready to “strike” when we did something wrong, somewhat a holdover from our very young days.

God was the spiritual “cop”, judge and jury. For many this image remains and life is lived out of fear of when the hammer will fall! Read the Old Testament, the hammer surely fell on the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, Sodom and Gomorrah and the numerous times Israel was conquered because of their sins as a nation. There is in the famous words “the rest of the story” in the New Testament. We must realize with birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ how dramatically everything changed for our relationship with and to God!

Many of us probably carry trace of that picture of God from childhood with a tinge of fear. We know better because of the New Testament and the promises made by God through His Son Jesus Christ .

This is why it is important in this Lenten season to take the time, to spend the time to invest in the relationship you have with God. Just like a courtship, and marriage, time spent enriches, deepens, and strengthens

the relationship. The Bible talks in 2 Corinthians 9:6 *“remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”*.

When we do spend time with God his real nature is revealed to us and we know of the immeasurable love, grace, and forgiveness He has for us!!! Then we live a life in gratitude for that which we know has been done for each one of us. We will live out a life and do the right thing not because of fear within, but because we return some of love to God that He continues to show us. When we stumble, we know God lifts us up and loves us as we are. This knowledge held in our spirits only comes by that genuine relationship with God. We can hear it every Sunday, but until we know it, it will never be real and reflect in our lives.

Lent is a season of the church and has been observed by it for centuries. It is a time for each one of us to look at our relationship with God and ask another question “what is wrong with this picture?” It is a time to redraw our own picture of God by taking a moment each day to read a scripture, to *“be still and know I am God”*, and reflect. John Wesley, by his own personal experiences knew that growing a relationship with God was a daily task and a life long journey.

A prayer for this forty days of Lent *“God, I long to be closer to you and grow in our relationship. Guide my time and draw me to you”*. Amen.