

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: [Isaiah 40:25-31](#).
- B. This is the first lesson in a series about man's false concepts of God.
- C. The trouble with many people today is that they have not found a God big enough for their modern needs. Their life has taken them in a score of different directions and their mental horizons have been expanded to the point of bewilderment by world events and scientific discoveries, while their ideas of God have remained largely static.
- D. In short... *our God is too small*.
- E. And this brings us to the conclusion that there are many Xians whose childish conception of God is so small and distorted they cannot stand up against the winds of real life.
- F. We are living dissatisfied lives w/o any real faith at all because we do not have a concept of God in our mind that is big enough to "account for life" or "fit in with the scientific and information age" we live in.
- G. This morning I want to look at five concepts of God we have allowed ourselves to develop and maybe not grow out of.

I. **ONE, THE RESIDENT POLICEMAN OR "COSMIC COP."**

- A. To many people, conscience is all they have by way of knowing God. This arbitrator is a small little voice that makes them feel guilty and unhappy before, during and after a wrongdoing.
- B. But conscience is a terrible guide and has very little to do with God. God put it there, but conscience is not directed by God, it is shaped, molded and changed by the people and circumstances around us. Here are 3 examples:
 - 1. A child raised by vegetarian parents will feel guilty as an adult when eating meats.
 - 2. A child taught by his father to never shoot a sitting bird while hunting will do so and feel the conviction by doing wrong.
 - 3. Many are affected by propaganda to hate or rail against someone or something (the Nazis in Germany against the Jews).
- C. Since the conscience can be trained it can never really be seen as God. If it were so, God could be a sensitive, over-reacting tyrant to one person and an insensitive, un-accommodating "voice within" which would never interfere with a man's pleasure.
- D. And finally, to view God as a type of "cosmic cop" is to never put God in a place to be worshipped, loved or served. Conscience at its best is only a nagging inner voice that spoils our "pleasure" and keeps us rather negatively on the path of virtue.

II. **TWO, THE PARENTAL HANGOVER.**

- A. Very simply stated, this erroneous view of God is based on the relationship between father and child, that the child learned (and lived) while at home.
- B. Two extremes are possible:
 - 1. The child views God as a tyrant who believes everyone and explodes with anger at misbehavior.
 - 2. The child views God as one who allows for self-indulgence and only gives a small "slap on the wrist" for bad behavior.
- C. People then grow up either resenting God and in rebellion to His strict ways or really showing no need for discipline due to God's weakness in punishing wrong behavior.
- D. But to me, the real problem with this concept of God is:

Many people who look to God as a father figure like that of their earthly father think they out grow their need for God. Just as they grow and mature becoming more and more independent of their earthly father, the parental hangover concept of God says that God is only for immature children and adolescents. Since adulthood w/a family of my their own they don't see a need for God.

- E. To those who view God this way, the only time they look to Him is in times of crisis and trouble. They want to talk to Dad (God) one more time about a difficult matter.

III. **THREE, THE GRAND OLD MAN.**

- A. When some, young Sunday School children were asked to write down who God is many wrote that, "God is a very gentle old man living in heaven..."
- B. This concept is due to several reasons:
 - 1. A child's superiors are always "old" to him, so God must be the oldest of all.
 - 2. A child is told that he will be able to do "such-and-such a thing" when he is older and since God can do all things and have all strength and wisdom He must be very old indeed.
 - 3. Since he has learned the OT stories of God dealing with men a very long time ago, he quickly visualizes God as someone quite old.
- C. The real danger in the "grand old man" concept of God is not so much that God is old but that *God is old fashioned*. God is not in touch with life today. Talk about a generation gap!
- D. When asked, several adolescents said they didn't think God understood radar. Then they laughed at themselves and said, "Well I guess He really does." As simple as this test is it is quite enough to show that in the back of their minds these youngsters held an idea of God quite inadequate for modern days.
- E. These young people were revering the memory of a Grand Old Man, who was great in His own day, but who could not possibly be expected to keep pace with modern progress!
- F. We need to really work on this one if we want to save our young people. By having KJV Bibles, using archaic terminology in worship services and prayers and showing them an image of God who worked in the OT and not in the NT, we are giving our youngsters an image of God that doesn't fit their life. With all the fast-paced changes in the world today they may need a bigger God than we do!

IV. **FOUR, MR. MEEK-AND-MILD.**

- A. I can understand seeing God (or JC) as being meek, but not mild. God is not some "milk-toast" type deity that gets run over easily and let's sleeping dogs lie and wouldn't say "boo" even in jest. On the contrary, God has never been one to run away from trouble and bury His head in the sand. If God were mild He would quickly become both uninspired and uninspiring.
- B. Meekness is strength under control and should be taught as something powerful, not a weakness (Mt. 5:5). Similarly, I cannot see Jesus as being One who is mild.
"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth."
- C. Jesus (the incarnate God, to see Him is to see God) was a man who did not hesitate to challenge and expose the hypocrisy of the religious people of His day (Mt. 10:34-36).
"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 "For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; [36] and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD."
A man who had such a personality that He walked unscathed through a murderous crowd; a man so far from being a non-entity that He was regarded by the authorities as a public danger.
- D. Mild? What an incorrect word for a person whose influence, teachings, and life, challenges and attracts men and women some 19 centuries later on every continent of the globe. Children need to leave the "tender shepherd" and move on to God in the hero status. But if the persona of "Mr. Meek-and-Mild" persists, kids will look to Superman, Batman, etc. for strength, authority, and power. Their concept of God needs to be updated so that they look to God for the same things.
- E. A further problem with Mr. Meek-and-Mild is that we have the wrong concept of saintliness. We incorrectly define a real saint as someone who never saw any harm in anyone and never spoke a word against anyone all his life. If this is the Xian definition of a saint and saintliness then Jesus was no saint! He told people exactly what they needed to hear, not what they wanted to hear!

- F. The danger of Mr. Meek-and-Mild is two fold:
1. This concept leads one to believe that God is woolly and sentimental. It is virtually impossible for an adult to worship a god whose emotional make-up is less developed than his own.
 2. If God be love (and He is, see 1Jn. 4:8) and also be “meek and mild” we have not described love in all of its virtues, but have debased and cheapened it.
The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

V. **FIVE, ABSOLUTE PERFECTION.**

- A. It can be so easily argued that since God is perfect, and since He asks complete loyalty of His creatures, then the best way of serving and worshipping Him is to set up 100% absolute standards of obedience and see to it that we obey them. After all, did not X say, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect?”
- B. Now God is absolutely perfect in everything He says and does. The problem with this concept is that some people think they must also live up to that standard to be saved.
- C. What happens when someone follows the God of absolute perfection? Answer: that which was to be a “perfect freedom in X” is now an overriding, never ending, fearful life of slavery. Trying to follow the God of absolute perfection is to make yourself a constant failure; unable to live up to that unattainable standard.
- D. Harm is done in 2 ways with the absolute perfection idea of God.
1. Harm is done to the one trying to live under that system because he can only become more guilt ridden and miserable as he fails to meet up to it. People finally just give up on this lifestyle and also give up on God.
 2. Harm is done by those who teach a system of perfection, because they will be trying to alter personality traits to achieve their goals. One personality type is what is called the perfect melancholy (Type A), but there are at least 3 other personality types that do not view life that way. To force everyone into the same mold is psychologically dangerous--even disastrous.
- E. The way out of all this mess, guilt, and pseudo standards of spirituality is found in X as He said, “*Learn of me for my yolk is easy and my load is light*” (Mt. 11:29,30).
- F. Xianity is not a performance by which we are rated of God such as gymnast or skater would be rated on a performance, but Xianity is a way of life. Instead of rules, schedules, quotas and performances to be kept at 100% completion, Xianity is something to be pursued, something to grow into and mature from. Notice the following scriptures:
1. Xianity is something to pursue (Phil. 3:13).
Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
 2. Xianity is where you develop into the likeness of X (Eph. 4:15).
...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,...
 3. Xianity is where you do not remain a babe but *mature* (Heb. 5:13-14).
For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.
- G. If God is a god of absolute perfection then when Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son, He was teaching falsehood about God (a god of absolute perfection would not have accepted the son back). God is Perfection, but is not a perfectionist. Nor does He demand absolute perfection from man. We are made perfect in X, by His blood (Heb. 10:19-22), but continue to strive for perfection (maturity) in our lives (see Heb. 6:1).

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. Tonight’s lesson continues this thought with several more incorrect concepts of God.

- B. I also hope to not “leave you hanging” by telling you what God isn’t and not telling you what God is. For now let us return to our scripture reading for today and see just a peek of the greatness far surpassing what we have talked about today (Isa. 40:25-31).
- C. We have covered the following (destructive) images of God:
 - 1. The resident policeman or cosmic cop.
 - 2. The parental hangover.
 - 3. The grand old man.
 - 4. Mr. Meek-and-Mild.
 - 5. The god of absolute perfection.
- D. May we invite you to the God of the Bible through His Son, JC.
- E. Plan of salvation for non-Xians, erring Xians.