

I. **TAKE GOD AS HE IS.**

- A. Unfortunately, we seem to want user-friendly god(s). We want a god who is like us. We want to reshape God to fit our own-needs. Satan doesn't mind our worshipping Jehovah God--as long as we reshape God into a form that suits our (really Satan's) purpose. The 18th century philosopher, Montesquieu, offered the - same sentiment when he wrote:
"If triangles had a god, he would have three sides." [p. 47]
- B. Before God ever begins to discuss the kind of behavior He wants His people of character to exhibit, He talks about the direction their lives need to take. His plan says first, "Put Me first," and second, "Accept Me for who I am" (Ex. 20:4). [p. 47]

II. **OUR ATTEMPTS AT SHAPING GOD.**

- A. Augustine defined idolatry as; "worshipping anything that ought to be sued or using anything that ought to be worshipped." [p. 47]
- B. This second principle of "accept Me for who I am" is forbidding false worship of the true God. Before we have metal images of God, we have mental ones. Even if we haven't translated our mental image into silver or gold, it's, idolatry nonetheless. [p. 48]
- C. What are some of the images of God we might have that dishonor Him?
1. **God is Uncle Sam.**
He's the God that says, 'If you're a good Xian, you're a good American.' We think that the American way and culture is God's way and God's culture. This is NOT true. [p. 49]
 2. **God is George Burns saying "Let's be buddies."**
If he is your God, all He wants from you is for you to be a good old boy, and he'll be happy to help you through the rough times. Sure, you've got a few bad habits. Who hasn't? Just be better than most of the people around you, and you'll be okay. [p. 49]
 3. **God is the Donald Trump model.**
You can have it all! God wants you to have everything. Just send some money (says the televangelists), and it will come back to you 20-, 50- or 100 fold.
This God never wants Xians to be sick, sad, or suffer in any way. And if you're experiencing any of these nasty "S" words, it must be your lack of faith (or contributions). If you worship this God, you don't have to give a moment's thought to the poor, the hungry, or the suffering, because they wouldn't be poor, hungry, or suffering unless they deserved it. And what's more, you get as wrapped up in material things as you want, because God wouldn't have given them to you if you didn't deserve them. [p. 49]
 4. **God is the Big Vending Machine in the Sky.**
We put in our quarter by saying our prayers, or going to worship, or doing good deeds, or in some way putting God in our debt, and then we wait for God to send us our candy bar. After all, we paid for it didn't we? You can hate whomever you please, resent others' taking advantage of you, feel superior to anyone not doing as much as you are and it won't matter at all to God. As long as you keep inserting those quarters; He has to give you something in return. [p. 50]
 5. **God as Santa Claus.**
His motto is, "Now what can I bring you next?" This is like treating God as a waiter. [p. 50]
 6. **God as Monte Hall.**
His motto is "Let's make a deal." If you worship him, you can do whatever you like until you get in a jam, then he'll negotiate how much good behavior it will take to get you out of trouble. [p. 50]

- D. So why do we try to reshape God? Because shaping Him into our image is easier than being shaped into His. It fits our purposes to reshape God, for a divine power who endorses everything that we already want can come in very handy!

III. **WHAT'S WRONG WITH IDOLATRY?**

- A. We don't want an off-the-rack" deity. We a custom-tailored God--one who will stand for the things we think are important and condemn the things that don't cramp our style, and wink at our little idiosyncrasies [p. 51]
- B. What do you want to do? What do you want to be? What do you want to have? Then shape God so that He thinks it's okay. It is using the One who ought to be worshipped. [p. 52]
- C. Any time we try to reshape our perfect God, all we do is distort Him. And if we worship a distorted God, we will be a distorted people [p. 53]

IV. **GOD WILL NOT STAY PUT.**

- A. One reason we "image" God is so He will "stay put." But God cannot be confined. Notice the story of the woman in John, chapter 4. In effect she asked Jesus: "Listen, you Jews say that God lives down in Jerusalem in the temple, but my fathers say He lives up here on this mountain. So I'm confused about where to go to find God when it's time to go to church. Where does God stay put?"
- B. Jesus' reply was, basically, that God doesn't stay put! See Jn. 4:24.
- C. The main impact onus is that if God is assigned to one location--the temple, or a church building, perhaps then the only thing we have to worry about is keeping our appointment with Him there. We can do what we want when we're not in His presence, because He'll either be ignorant or indifferent to it. In this case, regular attendance would be more important than the right character. [p. 55]
- D. Jesus knew that our character comes from the inside out. He spent a great deal of energy trying to explain this concept during His earthly ministry. Our character must be based on a God that is aware of both our actions and our attitudes wherever we are (Mt. 23:23-26). [p. 55]

V. **GOD WILL NOT BE USED.**

- A. Another reason God refuses to be imaged is that He refuses to be manipulated. [p. 57]
- B. Perhaps this frustration with God's elusive nature also helps explain our tendency to look for formulas, plans, or 1-2-3 steps that give us the inside track on how to control God. [p. 58]
- C. For many of us, it is hard to accept that God reveals Himself to us when He wants and as He wants. It is much more comfortable to believe we have Him "pegged." We want to shape Him into something our minds can handle so that we can know exactly who He is and where He is, and we can accurately predict in any given situation what He will do. But God is too big for that kind of manipulation. We were designed to meet His purposes, not the other way around. [p. 58]
- D. God knows that if we are to live lives of character, we need to remember our place in the scheme of things. He is the Master Potter that created us out of the clay. God's greatest honor to us was that He made us in His image. And our greatest dishonor to God is to try and remake Him in ours. [p. 59]

VI. **GOD'S PLAN FOR SHAPING US.**

- A. **To Reveal Himself to Us.**
 - 1. It is very tempting to want a single snapshot of God, to find one facet of His character and build our worship around that aspect of God. But what He asks is for us to read His book and look at the entire photo album. If we'll look at the whole album--the Bible--His Word will start to convict us of His love, His holiness, His justice, His grace, His wrath, His righteousness, and His faithfulness. And the list goes on and on. Then, after we've read His Book cover to cover, we'll know in truth that He is:

- a. Too huge to be represented...
 - b. Too unfathomable to be understood...
 - c. Too mysterious to be predicted. (p.59)
See Isaiah 40:13,14, 21-22,25-31.
2. Notice the following passages:
- a. Paul refers to Christ as "the image of (the invisible) God" (2Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:1 5).
 - b. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being" (Heb. 1:3).
 - c. "Anyone who has seen Me, has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).
- B. **To Reshape Us into Himself.**
- 1. It comes down to this, then: God is not the one with the image problem. We are. We are the ones whose image has been scarred and marred by sin (2Cor. 3:17-18). [p. 60]

LESSON FIVE: RESPECTING WHAT IS HOLY.

I. THE PIVOT POINT.

- A. In people of character, God is the pivot point. He is the one given, the one unchangeable point of reference. For it is only when we know how to respond and relate to Him that we can begin to 'see how we should interact with the people around us. [p. 65]
- B. God's Code of Ethics begins with two principles teaching us how to relate to Him:
 - 1. Put God first, and
 - 2. Take God as He is. [p. 65]
- C. The third principle God gave His people is to respect what is holy (Ex. 20:7).

II. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

- A. Have you considered the importance of names? A good name is more desirable than great riches. [p. 66]
- B. For example, a name can stand for a reputation, see Prov. 22:1. When I say:
 - 1. Martin Luther King, what do you think of?
 - 2. Abraham Lincoln, what do you think of?
 - 3. Benedict Arnold, what do you think of?
- C. Names represent character, and they also represent authority. If I were to approach a head of state in my own name, he wouldn't give me the time of day. But if I came as an ambassador in the name of the president of the United States, he would treat me with respect, because of the authority of the name in which I came. [p. 67]
- D. When God gives us His name or names, He is inviting intimacy. He is saying, "Get to know Me." You see, we don't give God names. God volunteers His names to us. Anytime God reveals one of His names to us; He tells us something about His character and nature. See Psa. 9:10. [p. 68].
- E. Consequently, God's name should never be used in connection with vanity (Isa. 52:5). [p. 69]
- F. Have you ever thought about how many times each day the Holy God who made heaven and earth must hear His name blasphemed or profaned? Profanity, by the way, comes from two root words: pro, meaning "out of," and fanum, meaning "temple." Therefore, profanity literally means "out of the temple." A person profanes something when he takes a holy thing and uses it out of its holy context.
Of course, when questioned about profanity, most people respond, "I didn't mean anything by it." But the point of the third principle is that we shouldn't utter God's name unless we do mean something, We must respect what is holy. [p. 70]

III. HOW WE MISUSE GOD'S NAME.

- A. **As a Curse.**
 - 1. This type of profanity is an example of weak people using strong words, and it's one of the most common ways people misuse God's name. We all know someone who gets angry or frustrated and asks God to damn whom- or whatever he sees as the source of his problem. [p.70,71]
 - 2. By the way, did you bow that when we ask God to damn someone, we're demanding God to do something He's never done? John 3:17,18 tells us that men condemn themselves when they refuse the light of the Son of God and choose darkness instead. God's name should be a blessing, not a curse. [p. 71]
- B. **As an Exclamation Point.**
 - 1. People often use the names of the Godhead to express reactions of all sorts of emotions. You have heard people say, "Oh my God," and "Jesus." This is using God's name(s) as a synonym for "Oh, you're kidding!" or "I can't believe that!"

2. For many people, though, misusing God's name is not a sign of ignorance or disbelief, but a symptom of a lack of emotional control (Mt. 12:34-37). [p. 71,72]
- C. **As a Cliché'.**
1. It's such a good way to sound spiritual? We say, "Oh praise the Lord!" with such regularity that we don't even realize what we're saying anymore. God's name should be used or associated only with things of substance and genuineness. [p. 73]
 2. We're not to use God's name lightly for our own purposes. God's name is not just some designer label we wear to look good in front of our peers. We don't use it to impress "people. When we use God's name lightly, we show that we take God lightly as well. [p. 74]
- D. **As a Weapon.**
1. Another way people in the church misuse the names of God is to intimidate others. For example, Brother So-and-so walks up, puts his arm on your shoulder and says, "Brother, God told men to tell you..." Sometimes we may confuse the Father's wishes with those of our own. [p. 74,75]
 2. It is an awesome thing to use the name of the Lord. Don't use His name as a weapon to intimidate others. [p. 75]
- E. **As an Endorsement.**
1. Sometimes we try to link our names with the King of kings by using God's name for our own personal gain. Our society accepts the fact that association with rich, powerful, or popular people lends credibility to what one says or does. This game is not appropriate with God's name. [p. 75]
 2. I don't believe God wants His name marketed for people's selfish purposes. If you are a Christian, be a Christian businessman. But I don't know that He wants the Praise the Lord Lumber Company. [p. 76]
 3. I've been guilty of using one of God's names to endorse things that I want when I pray. How many of us have prayed and invoked the holy name of our Lord Jesus when the sole intention of that prayer was just to get God to do something we wanted for our own selfish purposes? (Jas. 4:3) [p. 76]

IV. HOW WE SHOULD USE GOD'S NAME.

- A. **As a Claim to Authority.**
1. A good way to positively state the third principle might be "You shall take the name of the Lord your God in earnest." We should care about whether or not God's name is honored (Mt. 6:9).
 2. Notice also the following scriptures and the use of God's name to claim authority; Psa. 29:2; Ac. 4:12; Rom. 10:13; Ac. 22:16.
- B. **As a Call to Integrity.**
1. The third principle is asking us if God can endorse our lives--if He would really want to sign His name to them. "Change your life or change your name."
 2. Using God's name is a call to integrity (2Tim. 2:19; Col. 3:17). [p. 78,79]
- C. **As a Call to Intimacy.**
1. God's concern was not our use but our misuse of His name. See Jn. 16:23.
 2. He wants us to use and to wear His name because doing so will cause us to be people of character. Honoring His name will change us:
 - a. From haughty to humble.
 - b. From pompous to poor in spirit.
 - c. From rebellious to respectful. [p. 79]