

God (#1)

The Creating God Who Calls His Creation to Him

By Bob Young

Introduction

Peanuts—Charlie Brown comfortably in bed with Snoopy snoozing on his lap. Charlie musing, sometimes I lie awake at night and I ask, where have I gone wrong? A forlorn look comes over Charlie's round face as he adds, then a voice says to me, this is going to take more than one night.

That is a humorous expression of our own personal feelings—deep inside we sense the strange paradox. Sometimes we do things that make us genuinely proud, we are unselfish, even sacrificially caring. But other times we can be so self-centered, so mean-spirited. We promote ourselves at the expense of others. Who are we? That is a question worth answering, and one that will take us to the very heart of the human dilemma. Today we want to struggle with what the Bible says concerning our identity, and thereby see God, see ourselves, and see our future.

God CREATED/MADE us.

First, we are dual beings. We must learn when and where and why and how God is at work in our world—we must understand the work of God in the past—to have hope for the future. The early chapters of Genesis begin the story of what God has done for us. We must share, find strength, and reach out with this good news.

In 1:26-31, we learn that we are image of God people. We have been made in his likeness. In 2:4-7, we learn that we are living beings. This is the foundation. This is the beginning.

We are God's handiwork. Ps. 8:1-5.

We are dependent on God

We find our origin solely in God

We have a special purpose from God

We are in God's image. This truth addresses a basic problem in human self-definition. There have been some weird explanations given as to what it means that we are image of God people. Some of these explanations are very "New Age."

Being in the divine image involves a special standing.

Being in the divine image involves a future goal

Being in the divine image involves a glorious fellowship in a community.

What does it mean to be image of God people?

May have to do with our spirit and reasoning. We are like him--body, soul, and spirit (1 Th. 5:23).

May have to do with dominion or rule.

May have to do with the capacity for relationships, as we are the only creature which can relate to God in intimacy (1:26-27). We can also note that human beings can relate to their environment (v. 15) and can relate socially and familiarly (v. 18). Numerous NT passages suggest the importance of such relationships (Matt. 22:37-40; Good Samaritan in Luke 10; Matthew 25 judgment scene). We can relate to God, neighbor, and self. We are made to be in relationships. This is the significance of the church and the unity and bonding of the church. That we operate in relationships is an imperative of God.

This means also that there is no salvation in isolation. Salvation is always in relationship. The primary work of God is to restore relationship. God restores relationship between himself and his creation (Eph. 2:11ff) but also restores relationship horizontally in the same text. We may not realize the imperative nature of relationships, especially in our world of short-term relationships. We may not see that sin affects many

relationships. That lostness is in reality the loss of relationship, spiritual lostness is the loss of relationship with God and his people.

We ask then, what was lost in Eden? Relationship with God was lost (2:16-17). Relationship with the environment was lost. Relationships between people were marred (Rom. 5:12). Sin and lostness is more than a legal problem with God whereby sin defines us as criminals. We also have a mortality problem. In Eden a whole series of relationships is shattered (Gen. 3:7), showing us that sin is not just an act or thought but is a power. There is the loss of relationship socially (Rom. 7:24-25). There is the loss of relationship with self and trials never intended by God come into the human experience. There is the loss of relationship with God (3:8) so that the man and woman hid themselves. They/we were created for relationship but lost it, so that in 3:24 they are cast out. In Gen. 3:12, we learn there is the loss of relationship within the family, and we see individualism rear its ugly head. Note that God is not asking about man's location for information, but to make man search. By Gen. 4:9, there is so much loss of relationship socially, the shattering of brotherly love, that it is hard to maintain friendships. We see the fragmenting power of sin. In 6:5, the power of sin has brought violence to society. This is a problem continuing to our own day. Rampant about us is loneliness, and such issues in alcoholism, drug abuse, physical abuse, suicide, depression, sexual promiscuity...the list goes on and on.

The problem becomes so acute that God had to destroy all but eight souls. Society was destroyed by sin. The relationships that were designed to hold society together had destroyed it, but we do not understand, even today. By Genesis 11 and Babel, it had happened again.

The lesson is the importance of relationships, but this must be understood. Sin is not merely a legal problem, but it separates us from all that is precious and meaningful. It destroys peace and harmony. Sin! --undoes family, home, society. The problems are sin--war, church problems, sin. Sin is the undoing of relationships so there are no more meaningful relationships. God wants to restore relationships on this earth, through Christ and the church. There is no salvation in isolation, and thus there is no maintenance of salvation in isolation, hostility, and division. We must love, and work toward relationships. Such is essential to God's pattern. We must see that all are walking wounded. Who are we? We are God's handiwork, we are God's image, we are part of a community.

II. God CALLED/CALLS us to return.

In the midst of our human failure, God comes searching for man (Gen. 3:9). This is unique to Christianity among all the religions of the earth. The calling of God is such a significant theme in the Bible. Every Christian is called by God.

Sin is a failure of the human heart – Sin is a failure of community

God in 3:21 shows us death for the first time, the death of an innocent to restore some semblance of relationship, so that we can live together.

We are alienated, condemned, enslaved.

Our failure robs us of the enjoyment of community God intends for us and leaves us isolated and alone—alienated.

Condemnation refers to the sentence or judgment which hangs over us because of our sin.

Enslavement means we are in bondage to a hostile, alien force that has overwhelmed us.

In Gen. 12:1-3, if we will listen to God, trust him, he desires to bring back together all that is frustrated and fragmented, and he will bless through the promised seed of Abraham.

In Ex. 20, God erects a perpetual memorial to the hardness of man's heart. Carved on stone, designed to assist in some basic guidelines for living together in relationship--with God, family, neighbor, foreigner, self. Such is the

sorry state of society. Only if God can eradicate sin can there be harmonious relationships. Thus, when we hear the promises of Isa. 2:1-4; 9:6ff; 11:1-9, mankind awaits God's great work to restore harmony and love. Gal. 4:4 declares the coming of Jesus Christ, who will reveal God, and will reveal us to ourselves. He will show us God, he will show us us. We find in Jesus Christ a model, and he comes modeling what the relationship between God and man, between man and man, can be. He tells me who I am, and what I can be. We follow our models. We become like our parents. Alcoholism and a host of other problems runs in families. God's plan is for modeling (see Titus 2). John 1:1-14 says he shares a common nature with us (1:14,18). Jesus tells us little about God that we do not already know. In fact, Isa. 40-50 may tell us more about God than the entire New Testament. But in John 3:16, in all of his life, Jesus tells us how God acts! He shows us the God who gives, loves, and dies! He declares our importance. Rom. 5:8ff. Now we know, see, understand. He models relationship with God. He loves despite the problems, he works with us, he stays with us, he gives his life to restore relationships on this earth, both vertically between God and his creation, and horizontally between human beings.

Jesus comes satisfying our legal problem, but there is more. Mt. 16:18ff says his is a social mission. Eph. 2 shows that he wants to get people together as Christians. This is no mere philosophy, or political scheme, but love. He teaches us to live in relationship (2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17) not only individually but collectively (5:18-21). Thus we find in Jesus Christ harmony, love, family. And Earth has never seen our kind, he is evidence of that. God does work today.

III. God RECREATES/UNITES us.

God provides among his people a center to develop friends, to find insight into personal relationships and the dynamic of community. Thus, God has knit together his people so that a fragmented world wants to be a part of something so grand (Eph. 4:1ff; 4:32; 2 Tim. 2:24ff; 1 Pet. 3:15). He does this recreating work through Jesus.

Remember that our problem is four-fold—alienation, condemned, enslaved, depraved. Jesus comes reconciling, justifying, redeeming.

There is no work of God solely to remove sin, but God's work is to remove the sin which divides, and when sin is really dealt with, division is gone and there is a fellowship unlike any other in the community. There is power in relationships which are built by God (John 10:10).

What is this all about? We may feel empty, lacking, but our abundance is in our unity. We find power for our relationships within the family, and have a family for eternity (Matt. 19:29). We have an identity, a character as the people of God, still in unity, love, harmony, and peace. Such are yet the identifying characteristics of the people of God. Other attributes may be important, but we cannot be the people of God without this recreation.

Conclusion

Thus we declare that we have a message for the lost world. When will we grow? When we submit to and live out the relationship principles Jesus Christ insists on. When we love one another as brothers and sisters, seek to touch, get rid of the veneers and facades, love, spend time together, world will take note.

John 17:20-23.

John 15:12-17. This power is focused in the unity of God's people.

John 17 still indicates that the world will never be able to get along until God is the unifying force. Christians must show a world that is in turmoil that God unites. Relationships are God's imperative. Jesus Christ was God on earth—power. He is also our destiny. If our God is one, his people are one (Ruth). 1 John 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 12:112-13. Thus, he solves our sin problems, our social problems, our death problems, our power problems.