

What Does God Want? (1) -- Recognize God: Recognize Reality by Bob Young

In my life, ministry, mission involvement, there are a few questions that continually resurface and catch my attention. I write about them, speak about them repeatedly, perhaps because they are elusive. I find answers, but I continue to refine my understandings. This series of studies or sermons is not a new series, but neither is it an old series simply re-preached. This is the struggle put on display, in full view.

Thus, THE question. What does God want? In a series designed to help us understand God – God with us, for us, in us, beside us, before us – I mentioned briefly that four questions summarize the challenge of faith. Who is God? Who are we? What was God doing in Jesus Christ? How should we respond?

The first two questions are correlating questions, because human creation is made in God's image, in his likeness. We cannot answer the second without answering the first. We cannot understand the human situation without first understanding God. The goal of the Christian life is the formation of Christ in us, to be conformed to his image, to be transformed via mind renewal. This theme echoes throughout the New Testament.

Thus, you understand my purpose: I go back again and again to a single question: *What does God want from me?* More broadly, how can we summarize clearly God's desire for us as human beings? I believe there are important applications in ministry, missions. Let me recount briefly the genesis of the question, how this particular question was first presented to me.

Jan and I traveled by bus from Guatemala City to Tegucigalpa, probably about 15 years ago. We saw remote villages on hillsides in eastern Guatemala. I wondered, hypothetically, what would I say to the inhabitants of those villages if I had only a brief time to explain to them my faith in Christ? What would I say? What would I exclude?

What does God want from the persons with whom we interact? What does God want from people around the world? What does God want from his church? What does God want from me today? From you? From us?

Knowing the background of the story, you will also understand my desire to simplify the answer. We have made Christianity complex. We have drawn distinguishing lines based on minutiae. My first "stab" at an answer suggested a sequence of four parts, like this: God desires that we **recognize him, respect him, respond to him, and relate to him and our fellow human beings.**

I continually expand, reorganize, rethink. Thus, our topic for this series, what does God want? And, beginning with the question, who is God? a correlating question, what does it mean for us recognize God? And further, to recognize him as he really is?

God wants to be known, AND, he wants to be known accurately. This is our beginning point in this first lesson of the series. God, recognizing God, knowing God, growing toward an understanding of God. Recognizing God allows us to recognize reality, realize reality. Two categories – God, not God. Seen, unseen. Permanent, passing away. What is the nature of this temporary world? How do we define, grasp, live in the midst of reality? How often do we treat the temporary as permanent?

Recognize God. God desires that his human creation, made in his image, recognize him. God wants us to be able to see him and to know him – for who he really is. The gospel, good news, begins with who God is. If we are image of God people, who we are depends upon who God is.

Who is God? What is God like? God is above nature; he is not a part of nature. In Jesus, the Creator steps into his Creation. God is Creator, Sustainer, and Savior. Much of who God is, his nature, is summarized in his love, but other characteristics of God are revealed in the Bible and in human experience. We cannot effectively preach the gospel, in the US or in countries around the world, without making certain that the foundation is laid – understanding God's identity, who God is. Many misconceptions of God exist. We must rethink who God is before we can understand his desire for his world, what he wishes to accomplish in the world as we know it.

God sent Jesus so we might know God fully, for all that he is. God is not only revealed in the natural, physical world. God reveals himself in Christ Jesus. We are not dependent only upon a written word as were the Jews as they sought to understand God in the Old Testament. God has now been seen and understood in the life of a real person, living out the reality of the presence of God. That God can be seen in the lives of people has implications for what we do and how we do it as we live our daily lives in his presence and service.

Preaching the gospel, sharing the good news, begins with the person and purpose of God. God desires that people recognize him and come to know him in the full reality of who he is.

The purpose of this series is not to expand each point—the expansion of this first point, God’s nature, would require a parenthetical study series – a series within the series.

But know this, the first step is to recognize God, to know God as he is.

Without such understanding, we will not understand ourselves, and we will struggle with the fullness of the gospel. We will struggle to understand God’s actions in Christ, and our response.

Recognize reality. We are human beings, how do we understand the human experience, our human environment, this biological world in which we live? Who are we? We are dual natured beings – image of God, living beings.

Briefly to close. Recognizing divine reality, and human reality, God and the reality in which we live in this world, already points to Jesus, the divine Word that comes among us, dwells among us, takes our nature, combining divinity and humanity. Just thinking about where we are going—but that is getting ahead of our story.

Before we consider what God was doing in Jesus, we need to consider that God wishes to be respected or revered. That theme we will explore in the next lesson.

For now, we have merely set the stage. God. Human creation in his image, but living in a temporary physical world.