

The Word of Truth Ministry Presents

#SS03

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THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF GOD

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

Many years ago I told the Lord in prayer that I would not touch the Bible, that I would not study the Bible, unless I could do it seriously. I had to be serious in my Bible reading and in my Bible study. At that time I pledged and committed myself to believe the Truth that He would show me and to walk in the light of that Truth.

Peter's epistles are not long, but in the final words that he wrote, he warned about being led away with the error of the wicked, that they might fall from their own steadfastness. Then in **2 Peter 3:18** he wrote, **but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Now this did not mean that for the first year of a Christian's life, he should grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then say, "Now this has come to an end; I've graduated. There's nothing more about Him to know." Nor does it mean that at the end of twenty-five years he graduates. But whether one is a believer for fifty years, sixty years, or seventy years, he should never cease to grow in the knowledge of his Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus.

In the past several decades men have made scientific discoveries about the moon. Each time they bring back a new collection of rocks and each time before they examine them they announce that this may solve the secret of creation; but so far it has not solved it or added very much to our knowledge. These men have had the experience of standing on the moon. As a Christian, you and I have had the experience of becoming a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ; and if you asked which is the most important, which is the greatest, it is that you should believe. Standing on the moon will get a man nothing as far as God is concerned. It will bring him no nearer to God and take him no farther from God, but the experience of coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ is an experience that will allow those who believe to claim every promise that God has made.

My life has been committed to the task of magnifying the Lord Jesus Christ, to the task of knowing everything that possibly could be known about Him. To gain this knowledge is quite slow. I know there are those who think you can go to a Bible book

store and buy a \$3.95 book containing everything there is to know about the Lord Jesus Christ. But none of these books seems to go any further than the next or to be advancing in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, this is God's command to us, though very few may ever give it any consideration. We know that you can become a Methodist, a Baptist, or a Presbyterian without knowing or ever learning very much about Him. It seems that everything from that time on is tied up in some kind of service. But, let's determine that in this year, advancing in Truth, we will learn something fresh and something new in regard to Him; for this is the One Who is the Truth, the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, **"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"** (**John 14:6**). My life is committed to Him and to this Book of which He said, **"Thy Word is Truth"** (**John 17: 17**). This is not a commitment to any organization, establishment, man or group of men. I am a Christian individualist, committed to a deeper, fuller appreciation, a deeper, fuller knowledge of the Man Who is Christ Jesus.

In recent years, there's been a great deal of talk about God and even more talk about Jesus. It has almost surprised us that the name Jesus would become so prominent. A blasphemous immoral rock opera was written, the product of the untreated sewage of man's depraved mind. Yet, this has been most popular, causing most everyone to be talking about Jesus and to be offering their opinions about Him. In some periodicals and publications there have been articles about Him and about the Jesus movement and the people who call themselves the "Jesus freaks" and the "Jesus kooks." (I don't call them that; they call themselves that.) Working with some of them, I know their comments and find that the ignorance is abysmal. Where will we go to find knowledge about Him? I tell these young people, "You cannot know anything about Him by offering opinions and making up all kinds of things about Him. You do not honor Him by making up something that is just spun out of the corruption of your own mind. If we just spin tales about Jesus Christ with no basis upon the Word of God, it just becomes corruption." I'm glad, indeed, that I've been able to help some of these young people because even to admit the name of Jesus is to make a start. If that's the end, it might as well have never begun. But if they could go on from that point and learn about Him who is revealed in the pages of God's Book, how wonderful it would be! One's opinion on baptism, communion or the Lord's Supper is irrelevant. In the end, one's opinion as to which church is best or which church is right is not going to hinder him; but the important question is, "What do you think about Christ?" It's a Biblical question. "What think ye of Christ?" is a question He asked, and this concerns our destiny. This concerns the gift of eternal life; for if God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life, then what we believe concerning the Lord Jesus Christ is of the utmost importance. We must be found believing the record that God has given of His Son. That record is not written in creeds or in the books of men. It is written in the pages of God's Book.

Now, all men begin with an inherent knowledge of God. Man is born with an inherent knowledge that above his own being there is a Being that is Supreme. As a babe with no language, he couldn't speak of this. And parents confuse this knowledge when they don't base what they teach the child on the Word of God. When they tell the child such things as, "If you're not good, God will punish you," what they should say is, "If you're not good, I'll punish you." Because we're living in the dispensation of the grace of God, all God will do to anyone, bad or good, is just show him a love and a favor that he does not deserve. God is writing a record of His kindness. When a child does wrong, he deserves punishment from his parents. He is not going to get it from God. This is not dealing with the future; it is dealing with now. That is what we're talking about when we tell a child that if he isn't good, God will punish him. And so this starts the child with the wrong concept of God, the concept of God the punisher. The Bible presents Him as the God of love above everything else.

This may be an impossible illustration, although the idea has been conceived and written in stories such as those by Edgar Rice Burroughs. A child is cast upon a deserted island at the age of one year, not knowing the meaning of human instruction or human parents and yet, in some mysterious way, he grows to manhood. Knowing only the animals of the forest and the birds of the air, the child grows up with the knowledge in his mind that above his own being, there is a being who is Supreme. He could give up that knowledge, becoming an atheist; but he would have to give it up, because every atheist becomes an atheist. Man is born with the inherent knowledge of God. So, we begin with the knowledge of God. The Bible begins there. Assuming that men know God, it tells us what God did. This is what we should tell a child, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Bible gives Him a name that comes to us in English as God, in Hebrew as **Elohim**. So, we give this name to the one the child already knows, and as we go beyond this knowledge, everything we know about God from that time on must come from the pages of God's Book.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 9: 23, 24)

Now, what is it to exercise? When walking for exercise, one wouldn't just stroll along but stride to get exercise. To exert, especially for the purpose of training or improving, is the meaning of exercise. God says that He exercises loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is another name for grace. Grace is God's love and favor to the undeserving. God does exercise loving-kindness and for 1900 years He has done nothing to anyone but exercise loving-kindness. If people have sinned, He has not

punished them. God is not punishing nor destroying. This is not the time when every sin and transgression receives its just recompense and reward. At the present time God is exercising grace.

There have been times in the past when God was exercising both grace and judgment. For example, by the grace of God, the Israelites came through the Red Sea. They murmured there on the shore and then God showed them a favor that they did not deserve as He opened up a path through the Red Sea. Pharaoh's army came behind and God exercised punishment.

There we can see both grace and judgment. It was righteous that Pharaoh's army should be destroyed as they sought to bring Israel back into bondage when God had said, "Let My people go."

In a popular newspaper column, someone asking for advice wrote about the loss of his once-prosperous business. He seemed to think that believing on God would keep him from ever being sick or from ever experiencing tragedy. He seemed to point the accusing finger at God because God had not sustained him in his business, although a wicked businessman down the street was making extraordinarily high profits. Not understanding God, he didn't know what God is doing. He didn't know that success in the business world had to come from his own efforts and achievements. Making businessmen successful isn't God's present purpose even though the grace of God might work in their behalf.

But how are we going to learn about God and understand Him? First of all, we must have a concept of God. As an illustration, consider one's concept of a whale. Seeing pictures of a whale develops a different concept from actually seeing a whale. The reality might be amazing. An average Christian might conceive the idea of God as the "Old Father Time" concept, the old man with the beard in the Michelangelo painting in the Sistine Chapel, although repeatedly, the Word tells us that God is not a human being. In the average concept of God, He is the One Who lives down the street in a building called the church; **even though God said three times in the Word that He does not dwell in temples made with hands.** No matter how fancy the cathedral is, you cannot say that this is God's house, this is where He lives and you come into His presence on Sunday morning and when you leave, you go out of His presence. That is not an honest concept of God, for God is not a man. If He were a man, He could be in a certain place and you could go there to see Him. But God is not a man and He is not even like a man.

In our concept, we come to the fact of God the Son. Because He is the Son of God, one might think that God is the Father and Jesus Christ is His boy, **the man and boy concept.** That illustration can be true and understandable for a man who has a

son; but you cannot understand God by considering the characteristics of a human being. When we speak of the Son of God and God the Son, we're talking of the very character of God, the very being of God. If there were no Son, there would be no God. To think that one preceded the other is not the true scriptural concept of God.

God is in this room, and I can't get away from Him by going out of this room. A man in this room cannot be outside. A man has to be in one place at one time. A man cannot be here and in a distant city at the same time; but by His imminency, God can be in both places working as effectually for one person in one place as for another in a different and distant place. Being a man, I cannot project myself so that I could be here and in another place at the same time. I remember the death of a dear friend when the distance was too far for me to be there for the funeral. In anticipation of this occurrence, my friend had asked me to make a tape recording. This mechanical reproduction of my voice was the closest resemblance to a projection of myself that could be sent. There could not be a projection of myself or of someone else like me. Though a man cannot do that, the question is, "Can your God do it?" If your God cannot do it, then you do not know the true God revealed in the Bible; for the God who is revealed in the Bible is one. who can project Himself.

In photography, a slide is inserted in a projector to produce a picture on a screen. From the right angle, the rays of light reflecting the actual colors can be seen extending across the room to the screen so that the picture shown there is a projection of the slide. From the Bible there is no greater truth than the truth that God did project Himself and for a time was a babe in Bethlehem while He was still everything that He ever was as the God of the universe. In this projection of Himself, He was centered here on earth; and that babe grew up to be a man, representing God as a man upon the earth. This One expressed God and this One declared God.

Some years ago a visit from a friend from India created an interest in India and in a book about India. While the book mostly dealt with Calcutta, the city from which he came, it expanded to take in all the conditions that exist in India. Do you know that there are in round figures, 250,000,000 people living in the United States? There are over 500,000,000 people who live in India. This book told of the degradation and the poverty there, of the hunger, the disease and the difficulties for these people to stay alive. Indeed, it painted a terrible picture. In compassion one's heart would go out in yearning to help these people, especially the untouchables. Their plight is so tragic because from the very beginning of life, there are only certain jobs that they can have and certain work that they can perform. For example, they could clean the stable or the slaughter house, or handle the hides; but they could not process the meat in the slaughter house. A high-caste Indian Brahmin would refuse to eat anything on which even the shadow of an untouchable had fallen. In a restaurant if the shadow of an untouchable should fall on his food, in disgust he would shove it on the floor. Let us

suppose that in great compassion or divine compulsion, I would want to help these people. Let's suppose that I could project myself and be an untouchable in India in order to help them. As an untouchable there, I could also remain here in the United States. I could understand all that they experience and still retain my presence, my identity and position here. Since I'm a man, that is a ridiculous supposition, of course; but would you say that God could not do that? That would be denying God's Word because that is exactly what God did. He projected Himself and became a babe in Palestine to grow up under the same conditions and to understand perfectly the lives of those people.

As the Man Christ Jesus, He represented, He expressed, and He declared God. No wonder the Lord Jesus Christ could say, "**He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.**" No wonder He could say in **John 8:19**, "**If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also.**" This one was an extension of God reaching out and reaching down in order to help mankind. This one was our Lord Jesus Christ who was God. In **Matthew 11:27**, He said, "**All things are delivered unto Me of My Father.**" Everything was projected in Him, every thought, every word and every miracle that He performed. He also said, "**And no man knoweth the Son but the Father.**" This is incomprehensible. We take this by faith because we have confidence that it is the Word of God. We are not believing impossible things; we're believing the Book when the faith is God generated, a faith that God produced so that we do not doubt the Bible. Because He said, "**All things were delivered unto Me of the Father and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knowest the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him,**" we may say that we do not understand or comprehend this. We know that one came to earth 2,000 years ago who was the image of God, who was the very declaration of God, so much so, that to lay hold of Him was to lay hold of the Father.

This is a further illustration. Out in the West, there is the great American desert, called by the Mexican name, the Mojave Desert. Desert really means uninhabited place. Since the word desert signifies dryness, it is thought of as being dry. The desert has a peculiar fascination that sometimes becomes almost hypnotic. Though parts of the desert are now occupied, many people have lost their lives through this fascination. In the Mojave Desert, there are reservoirs for water from rain and melting spring snows brought through an aqueduct from the nearby mountains. The water that is collected, until it is needed by the thirsty people of Southern California, fills these reservoirs, some of which are giant lakes. Because they're in more or less inhabited desert where people pass by, some of these lakes are fenced with the familiar cyclone type of fence, it is usually eight to ten feet tall with barbed wire in three strips across the top to protect the water supply and to keep it clean and inaccessible.

Because it happens too often, it's not hard to imagine that someone driving out one of the main highways is fascinated by the desert and would like to see it just a little closer. He would like to get off the beaten path, the main highway. Finding a road he turns onto it and drives several miles. Curving around until it suddenly stops, the road just seems to wear itself out as it often does in the desert. Then realizing that the road has disappeared, he tries to turn around; but all four wheels are through the sand with the back wheels spinning. It is impossible to get out. He tells his wife, "There is enough gasoline in the tank so you can keep the air conditioner on while I go for help." The desert heat can be unbearable at 120 deg. which is almost normal in some desert areas. So, he starts out to find help. Before long the desert is taking its toll and his strength diminishes. As he loses his body moisture, his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth and he drags one foot after the other. Yet, somehow there seems to be almost the smell of water. There is a theory that when dying of thirst one can smell water for miles, but in this instance he senses that water is near. He wearily drags himself on until he comes to the reservoir; yet, he simply cannot reach it. You can imagine what a man in this condition would do. He begins to crawl around the fence searching for an opening, though there is none. As he moves around the curve of the fence, because the reservoir is quite full, he finds a place where the water fills a depression that extends under the fence. The reservoir protrudes in a little projection, and seeing this, he literally falls into it. He dips his face into it and drinks of this little projection of water that comes out from underneath the fence. When he does, he is drinking of the contents of the entire reservoir. By any scientific measurement, you could guarantee that he actually lowers the level of that reservoir by what he takes from this little projection.

Now, that is a true picture of God in Christ. This great reservoir which is God cannot be reached. We cannot get to Him for He is unapproachable until He projects Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. By drinking of the Lord Jesus Christ, we drink of the very fullness of God. Believing in Him, we believe in God. Rejecting Him, we reject God, because He becomes the One Who represents God to us. And no one can say, "I'll by-pass Him." You would never know God, you would never reach God except through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the one who was born to be our Savior. He was the great Jehovah of the Old Testament. Jehovah was also God projecting Himself, and He was seen in the form that would resemble that of a man. He was seen by Isaiah and Moses saw his back parts. Then, the time came when God projected Himself and one was born of whom it was said, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior." **Jehovah** of the Old Testament said, "**I, even I am the LORD; and beside me there is no Savior**" (Isa.43:11). "**A just God and a Savior; there is none beside me**" (Isa. 45:21). And again in **Isa.49:26 and 60:16**, we read, "**I the LORD am thy Savior and thy Redeemer.**" How could a Jew believe in a man who is a savior? You wouldn't even ask him to when his great God in the book of Isaiah has said, "**A just God and a Savior; there is none beside me.**" How would you ask a Jew to believe

that the one born in Bethlehem was a savior unless that one is Jehovah of the Old Testament? The great truth presented is that the Jehovah of the Old Testament by a further condescension became the Lord Jesus Christ of the New and then that one who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament literally passes from our view. We seem to hear no more about Him, because this is the one who is our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the philosophies of men, there is the title, The Supreme Being. That is not in the Bible, but it is a good title. The Supreme Being is a phrase which is a good combination of words. We also speak of him as the Almighty. That is a Biblical term, a translation, but nevertheless, a good description of God. For while there are mighty men, God is The Almighty. There is also the familiar term, the First Cause, that cause behind which there is no other cause. God is called the First Cause. The cosmological argument for the existence of God is that while one thing causes another, you have to stop somewhere. It could not go on and on infinitely. You have to come to a First Cause, so men use this as a term for God.

In at least three places in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is called the **Beginning**. In the Book of Revelation, He is called the Beginning of the creation of God. This does not mean that He is just the first thing that God ever created, therefore a created being. He is the beginning, the First Cause of all the creation of God. We are told in Colossians 1:18, simply that He is the Beginning, not the Beginning of this or that, just the Beginning, the First Cause.

Our Lord makes a clear and concise statement, although lost in the translation, that is found in **John 8: 24,25**. In verse 24, an accurate translation from the Greek would be, "I said therefore that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I Am, you shall die in your sins." Italicizing of the word, *he* as it is in the **King James Translation**, does not mean that it should be emphasized. This means that although it is not in the Greek, the translators inserted the word *he*. When Moses saw Jehovah in the burning bush, he said, "Who shall I say sent me?" God answered, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you" (Ex.3:14). Jesus Christ said that if you do not believe that I Am (the great title of the Jehovah of the Old Testament) you will die in your sins. John 8:25: "Then said they unto Him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, **The beginning**." The Greek here is *tenarken*, translated in the King James translation, even the same that I said unto you at the beginning. A correct translation would be: "Then said they unto Him, who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, I Am the beginning, even that which I also say unto you, I Am the beginning". This is the First Cause.

To make Him to be the second person as if there were one more important than the other as the first, second and third; to make Him a man, a superman, the angel Michael or the angel Gabriel; to say that He was just divine wisdom incarnate in a

man, these are misconceptions that cannot give us an understanding or appreciation of God. He is God. When you deal with Christ, you're dealing with God. Your attitude toward Him is your attitude toward God. To receive Him is to receive God. To believe on Him is to believe in the Father. He is the one who is declared to be the Creator.

Let us refer again to John's marvelous message in **John 1:1**, "**In the beginning was the Word.**" It has to start here when all things began and the Word was there. The Greek word here is *logos*,

expression. A word is an expression. This was the expression of God. Even a man is not without expression. In fact, his expressions are his personality. God was never without expression. With his first breath, a child can cry from the moment he is born. That's all the expression that he has. As he develops his vocabulary, he not only expresses himself with words, he expresses himself with deeds and acts. With no expressions, the child would have been still-born or dead. God is not only not dead; He never was dead. He has always had an Expression, that is the Son. The word son does not mean an offspring. It does not mean a boy. Could you imagine the sun without its rays, without its beams? It would be no sun, a dead globe in the sky. Could you think of a fountain without its streams? The streams are the fountain just as the beams are the sun in the way that it comes to us. **And God has never been without His son**, that one who has always expressed and declared God. "**The expression was God**" (**John 1:1**). This is our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who relates us to the Father.

According to **John 1:14**, this Word was made flesh. The very expression of God was made flesh, a man in this world. "**And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld His glory as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**"

Give (ascribe,) unto the LORD ye kindreds of the people, give (ascribe) unto the LORD glory and strength. Give (acknowledge) unto the LORD the glory due unto His Name" I Chronicles 16: 28,29.

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