

Pastor's Note

Hello

We've been looking at who God is and what His character is like. This week I want to look at what our response to God's plan should be. We know from the word of God that He is the creator. Genesis 1:1 *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* When you really consider this subject matter in depth, modern science cannot adequately dispute the fact that God is our creator. The major argument of the evolutionists hinges on the fact that the world did not develop to the point of the existence of man within six earth days. They take the word of God literally instead of figuratively and claim that it is scientifically impossible for the earth and all of its creation to have been made in six twenty-four hour days.

But the bible doesn't actually say that at all. And therefore the basis for their argument is in fact, false. No one knows how long a day is for God. How do we know that no one knows this? Let's review the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis. Genesis 1:5 *"God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day."* Genesis 1:8 *"God call the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day."* Genesis 1:13 *"There was evening and there was morning, a third day."* That's three days so far. How much time was that? Was it 72 earth hours? Let's take a look at verses 16 to 19. Genesis 1:16-19 *"God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light to the earth... there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day."*

There it is. God hadn't even made the sun or the moon, or even the stars for that matter, until the fourth day. We don't know what kind of light He created on day one in verse five but evidently that created light did not come from the sun because it hadn't been created yet. And if the sun had not yet been created then the earth was certainly not revolving around it in twenty four hour increments. So how long is a day for God? We don't know. No one knows. If we look at the scientific facts that are available to us, it is clear that God's days are pretty long. Let's just say that there is not enough coffee in the world to keep any of us going all day for one of God's days. Not even Starbucks.

This is a prime example of the fact that there is a major difficulty with our understanding of the bible. Some say, it's literal; you read it and it means exactly what it says. Some say, it's figurative; you read it and make analogies of the meaning it is trying to pass on through the writer's narrative. Some look at it and say "Well the bible says that God created the earth in seven days and seven nights and we have to take that literally because that is what the bible says." Some look at it and say, "Well Moses was simply using the analogy of days and nights in his narrative account of God's creation as it was revealed to him and we have to take that figuratively because the bible clearly says the sun and moon weren't even created until the fourth day."

Now the irony of those two statements is that I just used a literal argument to support a figurative position. Do you see how easy it is to get tripped up? What does God want us to believe? Please, pay close attention to this next point. It is probably the most important thing I can express to you. God wants you to live a balanced life. God does not want you to be off in one extreme or the other. "It's literal." "No. It's figurative." NO! It is both. Both styles of writing are used and sometimes both are intertwined within the writings of the same author. The bible was written both literally and figuratively and our path is to let the Holy Spirit of God lead us into all truth by and through the word of God. That is the balanced approach. There are many ways to interpret scripture and we have been killing, starving, and persecuting people for thousands of years in the name of scriptures. If you don't think scripture can be misinterpreted and twisted by the enemy to be used for evil, look around. It's happening out there, right now!

As Christians we must filter the word of God through the character of God. They are intimately and irrevocably intertwined. The word of God reveals the character of God and the character of God applied to the word tells us how the word of God should be interpreted. God is always consistent in his character and in his actions. If you come across a scripture that seems inconsistent with God's character; stop! Something is wrong. The character of God and the word of God are in lock step. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring truth and clarity to you for that scripture and all truth will be revealed to you through the renewing of your mind.

Romans 12:2 *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God; what is good and acceptable and perfect."* Not someone else for you. You may discern! This is crucial information for living the Christian life right here. We cannot be effective Christian men and women if we are walking around out there with no firm foundation. Our confidence in Christ is not

based solely on what we remember of our conversion experience. That can fade and time can cause feelings to diminish. Our confidence is right here. This is the bedrock. And we trust it implicitly because we have the Spirit of God to guide our minds into all truth; the truth right here in this word.

Genesis 1:27 *"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* In His image! Do you think God is a critical thinker? You were created in His image. God not only created human beings in His image but He interacted directly with His creation. He formed a relationship with them. Genesis 3:8-9 *"They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'"*

Clearly God was expecting to walk with them in the garden in the cool of the day. He was used to interacting with them. They had a close relationship and God undoubtedly nurtured them and taught them many things. He took care of them. But with the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, things changed. As we have discovered, God is Holy and His Holiness is pure light, there is no evil in Him. 1 John 1:5 says, *"This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."*

When we ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a part of us became evil. In order to save us from being consumed and destroyed by His holiness, His pure light, He removed Himself from our presence. We lost the close personal relationship with God that we had enjoyed from the beginning. Human beings were constantly exposed to the evil in the world and were no longer being nurtured in God's pure love. We lost our relationship with God and our relationships with one another changed. Without God's love we became selfish and evil creatures.

Genesis 6:5 *"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* Because of this, God wiped out the entire human race except for Noah and his family. Through all of this, God did not abandon His creation. Throughout these times God was ever reaching out to humankind and trying to create relationship. From the beginning He has been trying to teach us His character. God wants us to understand and incorporate that character into our lives; holiness, justice, mercy, grace, kindness, and love. Because that is how we were created to be.

Genesis 1:27 *"God created man in His own image; in the image of God He*

created him." As we have seen, the big problem God had was that humankind just didn't get it.

This is heavily reflected in Old Testament writings. Most Old Testament writings portray God from the point of view of how the author interpreted God's actions. If we read them literally, many of God's actions are interpreted as unkind or mean spirited but this has never been the case. God's Holiness requires justice and He is just. God's justice is always merciful and He loves mercy. Because of God's great mercy He offers us the free gift of grace. God's mercy and grace flow from His lovingkindness because God loves us and He is kind. But the majority of the accounts of the Old Testament were not written by men who understood the character of God as we do today. God was trying to teach them His character but we humans are slow learners and can only grasp a little bit at a time. In fact we certainly don't have the full picture even today. We are on a journey with our creator and He is teaching us little by little as we are able to understand.

How incredibly patient is our God. The Old Testament writer's understanding of what God was like was based on their culture and their understanding of the pagan god's of their time. Holiness, justice, mercy, grace, kindness, and love were largely foreign concepts to them. Even as God was trying to teach them these concepts, they were only able to glimpse small aspects of them in their time. At the appropriate time in the development of humanity God created something of an incubator if you will. He decided to begin the process of developing holiness, justice, mercy, grace, kindness, and love on a scale that would begin to show humankind how to understand and live out the characteristics of God that we lost so many years before in the Garden of Eden.

God took one man, Abraham and started focusing on teaching him and his descendants His character. Even with God's constant teaching it took two thousand years for Him to develop the human spirit to the level where we were once again able to interact with God's Spirit at a one on one level. He slowly worked with a group of humans for two thousand years to bring us to the place where we could actually understand what Jesus was going to do on the cross. God knew exactly when Jesus needed to come and personally show us holiness, justice, mercy, grace, kindness, and love. When we read about the life and teachings of Jesus we are reading about the character of God. In John 8:19 Jesus said, *"If you knew me, you would know My Father also."*

Jesus' character was exactly the same as His Father. Do you see how stark the contrast is between how Old Testament writers portrayed

God's actions and how New Testament writers portrayed Christ's actions in their writings? God and Jesus' character is the same. It has always been the same. *"If you knew me, you would know My Father also."* We learned a lot in the incubator. God's plan to bring humankind back into relationship with Him went into effect the day we ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of course it was a pretty long day and I'm not sure exactly what time of day it was when He set the plan in motion. The day started out pretty bad; "I go out to take a walk in the cool of the morning with the kids and kablam their eating the fruit and everything's a big mess." So, maybe it was say, O, dark thirty in the evening before He set the plan in motion, I don't know when He started it.

But God knew precisely how many thousands of years later we would be ready to receive His Spirit, and when the time would be right to send His son, Jesus Christ to put the pieces in place to make it possible for us to do so. Jesus made it possible for the evil of the world in us to be covered so that we can now be in relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our ever present teacher. In John 14:26 Jesus said, *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom my Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."* Humankind had been missing a direct link to God for thousands of years and we wonder why they became so completely evil and why it was so difficult for them to understand God.

With the Holy Spirit of God, we have come a long way in the past two thousand years. We are not physically walking in the garden in the cool of the day with Him yet, but we have made major strides in understanding and incorporating the character of God on both personal and societal levels. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go yet. We don't have to watch the news long to figure that out. But we have the Holy Spirit to help us as we are beginning to see and understand God's plan. Perhaps our ability to understand the character of God is on a par with our ability to understand and advance technologically. Our outlook is improving exponentially; the more we understand technologically the faster the new discoveries occur and the more we experience God's holiness, justice, mercy, grace, kindness, and love, the closer we come to taking on those characteristics ourselves.

God loves us and wants the best for us. This is who God is and this is His character and He will not stop until it is accomplished in us. We know the reasons for everything God does: Job 37:13 *"Whether for correction, or for His world, or for His loving-kindness, He causes it to happen."* And we have His promise that He will never stop seeking a relationship with us and

He will never stop teaching us His character. Isaiah 42:3-4 *"He won't brush aside the bruised and the hurt and he won't disregard the small and insignificant, but he'll steadily and firmly set things right. He won't tire out and quit. He won't be stopped until he's finished his work-to set things right on earth."*

God wants to have a personal relationship with his children. That's you and me and every human being. Out of His lovingkindness and mercy He wants to see us become all that He created us to be. He wants us to have His character. And in that character we will find perfect contentment, because that is what we were created to be. So the question becomes, how do we help? What do we do to make it happen in our lives and in our society? What is our part? First we must receive the Holy Spirit as our helper. To do this we must believe that if we confess our faults to Jesus, He will cover them for us so that God sees us as clean. God has bridged the gap of evil through His son Jesus Christ. All we have to do is "confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead" and Jesus will take our mistakes and cover us so that God sees us as clean.

When we confess our belief in God's son, Jesus Christ, God sends his Holy Spirit to live in us and we begin a personal relationship with God. That's the first thing we have to do. The second thing we do is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and mature. He will teach us how to live and how to take on the character of Christ. When we are in a personal relationship with God, we will begin to change. Romans 12:2 *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

You see we can't hang out with God and remain the same. We will begin to take on the character of God and we will experience contentment and peace we did not know were possible, because we will be transforming into what we were created to be. How many of you know that when we're in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time, there is a peace we experience that is beyond comprehension? Philippians 4:4-7 says, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

We know without a doubt that everything is as it should be. If you have yet to feel that kind of peace I want to highly encourage you to become who you were created to be. It's awesome. The third thing we will

do is help others find their personal relationship with God. We will join ourselves with other believers and we will practice the five-fold ministries of the church in our community and make a difference in the world. The fourth thing we will do is this. This is awesome. Remember there were two forbidden trees in the Garden of Eden; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life.

Genesis 3:22-23 tells us that God removed us from the Garden so we would not reach out and eat from the tree of life and become like one of them and live forever. But let me share with you what Jesus tells to us in Revelation 2:7 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God."* Isn't that awesome? As Christ's brothers and sisters, as children of God, we get to eat from the tree of life and live forever. If you are not a Christian you need to know that all of us who are Christians desperately want you to have this gift also. There is absolutely nothing that would fulfill the joy of our hearts more than to have you receive the greatest gift there is to get and join the family of God. Don't miss the best life has to offer, Find God! Do it today.

Blessings,

Scott

