

OUR IDEA OF GOD

Excerpts from a sermon by the Rev. Peter M. Buss, Jr.

A correct idea of God is to the congregation like the sanctuary and altar in a church, or like a crown on the head and a scepter in the hand of a king, as he sits upon his throne. From this hangs the whole body of theology, like a chain from its anchor-point. If you are prepared to believe me, the idea everyone has of God determines his place in the heavens (True Christian Religion 163).

Why is it so important for us to have a correct idea about God? Why is it that this one teaching—this one facet of belief—will determine our welfare to eternity? Why is it like the sanctuary and altar in a church, or like the crown and scepter of a king? Why is it the most important concept in all of religion?

If I were to ask you, “How do you get to heaven?” I’d probably get responses such as: “Live a good life,” or “Obey the Lord’s commandments.” These are correct answers. But a correct idea and belief in the Lord is even more basic than these statements.

It is no accident that there are two great commandments. The second one is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). In general this is a command to live a good life. But the first commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind (see Matthew 22:37-38). The reason for this is that we need to know who is asking us to live a good life.

For religion to make sense, we have to know what kind of God the Lord is. Why is He asking us to act in certain ways? If we don’t understand why He needs us to act according to His commandments, what’s to convince us to do so when the going gets tough, when temptation sets in and we feel like doing something else? The truth about God is indeed the starting point from which all the other facets of religion hang as links of a chain from an anchor point.

Now, we cannot know everything there is to know about God. Indeed, we would be foolish to try. But the Lord has made it easier for us to know some things. He has given us an ability to look at different facets of Him, different Divine qualities that He possesses. And He labels each one of these qualities with a different name for Himself. So we have Jesus which means *Savior*, and Christ which means *King*, and Jehovah which literally means *the One who Is*, and Immanuel which means *God with us*.

We also have some of His activities categorized under different names. He is the Creator and Redeemer; He is our Preserver and Comforter. All of these things help us to look at one aspect of God at a time, to understand it, and put it together with the other things we know about Him, so that our faith in Him can develop.

The same is true of the three most common names for God, which are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These also are different attributes of the one God, highlighting certain of His Divine qualities, so that we can come to understand our God more fully.

Father is the name which describes the Soul of the Lord, or His life-force—why He acts, what He cares about, who He is at His core. *Son* is the name of God which describes His body—the Human form we see in our Lord Jesus Christ, showing forth or revealing who He is and what He wants for us. *Holy Spirit* is the name given to what God does—the effect He has on us, the providence, enlightenment, comfort, and (eventually) salvation He can bring to us.

This makes sense if we remember that we all have a soul—a life force within us—and we all have a body. And these two together make it possible for us to do things—to think and speak and act, to walk, to express love, to reason, and to serve other people. Looking at the way we have been created, we can realize that it works the same way for God, for we are created in His image and in His likeness (see Genesis 1:26-27). That means that God has a soul and a body, and that He acts by means of these two.

We have many teachings about our Lord, and all of them help us to understand Him. All of them point to the fact that He is a God of love, a God who cares for us with more compassion and mercy than any human being could ever do. And He wants us to understand that He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is our one and only God. The beauty of these ideas about our God is that they make Him believable and accessible. They bring us closer to the Lord so that He can be a bigger part of our lives and so that we can work to be near Him forever in heaven.