



The Majesty of God

Traditionally the church has viewed God as infinitely great and glorious, but today's God is small. There is little fear and reverence. Instead of trembling in awe before His majesty, God is viewed as some kind of old, indulgent, grandfather figure, a sort of Santa Claus.

Men of God in the past

In the early church, men such as Polycarp and Ignatius showed great respect for God and died as martyrs rather than even for one minute yield to call Caesar Lord. Because of his reverence for God the Son, Athanasius contended earnestly for the divinity of Christ almost against the whole church of his day. He would rather be in a tiny minority than compromise. Similarly the Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Tyndale and Knox stood uncompromisingly on the side of truth whatever the cost because of their grasp of the glory of God. The Puritans and Covenanters of the seventeenth century were accused of being awkward and stubborn nitpickers because they stood firmly for truth. They saw all Scripture as weighty because it was the Word of God. Our own Disruption fathers, Chalmers, Cunningham, Candlish, the Bonars and many more suffered the loss of manes and stipends because they feared God and viewed Christ alone as the King and Head of the church.

Liberalism

Today, however, liberalism has diminished God and undermined the truth of Scripture. Evolution is regarded as having provided an explanation of the origin of man which does not require a Creator God. This theory has been warmly received by modern man as a possible deliverance from the Judgment Day. Even in the church, man has elevated himself at God's expense. Theologians decide that doctrines such as the wrath of God and substitutionary atonement should be rejected as uncivilised. Miracles are seen as impossible and God is locked away in heaven and unable to interfere in the world.

Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism with its easy-believism undermines the holiness of God and His sovereignty in salvation. The common antinomian teaching takes the words, '*You are not under the law but under grace*' and presses them too far. The so-called 'New Covenant teaching' which argues that the moral law revealed in the Ten Commandments is no longer binding brings in superficiality and a diminishing of God. The moral law is a description of the character of God. The 'Health and Wealth' gospel in essence asserts that God exists for the purpose of making man happy. Charismatics place God at the beck and call of man. God is ruled by the will of man who tells the Almighty what to do. Many today are questioning the existence of everlasting torment in hell. Surely, they say, a God whom the Scriptures describe as love could not possibly send someone to such a place forever. There is a failure to realise how great God is, how wicked even the smallest sin against such a God is and the punishment which rejection of God's love in Christ demands.

Contemporary worship

Contemporary worship takes the position that man is free to worship God in whatever way he likes. The best worship, they say, is that which makes man feel good and draws the crowds. What God

likes and what He lays down in His Word is not even considered. Reverence for God is gone and actually man is worshipped.

Ourselves

Even in our own circles we have been numbed by pleasure and prosperity. Suffering little by way of trials and persecution we have absorbed the spirit of the age. We have forgotten God's majesty and we do not fear God as we should. David Wells' assessment of the situation is worthy of being seriously considered: *'The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, His grace is too ordinary, His judgment too benign, His gospel too easy and His Christ is too common'*.

God's Glory

The Hebrew word for glory is *chabod* which means weighty and God is certainly that. Looking at God's majesty is like looking at a multi-faceted, brilliant diamond. Yet God is different. His glory is not reflected but He Himself is the source of all light. Also this 'diamond' is not under our microscope to be studied but as it were all around us in His immensity and we just little pinheads looking out. God is infinite and so incomprehensible to us. He dwells in light which blinds us and in darkness which we cannot enter. We can only know Him as he reveals himself to us and, praise be to His name, He delights in disclosing Himself. Yet He must veil His glory for if he revealed Himself wholly we would be burnt up. A man cannot see God and live.

The Revelation of God's Majesty in Scripture

Creation

The very first verse of Scripture sets before us an awesome God. *'In the beginning God created...'* God is already there when things began because He alone is eternal. Everything that exists was created by Him. He does not have to introduce Himself because we are all aware of Him and cannot escape the revelation of Him in nature and in our own conscience. The Father plans, the Son speaks the creative word and the Spirit perfects. All things were made out of nothing in the space of six days. When we think of the vast expanse of the universe, the innumerable stars, the complexity of life and man made in the image of God, we are filled with wonder.

Genesis 3

When God made man He entered into a covenant of life with him upon condition of perfect obedience. One tree in the garden was forbidden on pain of death. Satan came along and said 'You shall not surely die' and Eve, believing him, ate of the forbidden fruit and gave to Adam and he ate. God's holiness is revealed in the immediate spiritual death which they suffered. They are separated from God, cast out of the garden, suffer His wrath and curse and experience pain and suffering and death. How holy God is when all the pain and the suffering in this world can be traced to that one sin! God is angry with sinners every day and His wrath is constantly being revealed from heaven (Rom 1:18). Yet in the midst of God's revelation of His justice in Eden He also reveals His mercy, setting before fallen man a coming Saviour (Gen 3:15).

Genesis 6

From the fall there is a gradual progression of evil. In Genesis 6 we read of giants. A more literal translation would be thugs or men of violence. The sons of God, members of the professing church, enter into lustful marriages with the daughters of the ungodly. God sees the lust and violence and determines to destroy the earth with a terrifying flood. In His longsuffering He waits 120 years while the gospel is preached by Spirit-filled Noah but eventually the awesome judgment is poured out. The destruction is immense and universal. Everyone outside the ark is drowned including Noah's servants, friends and relatives. What a revelation of God's holiness to the eight who survived and to us!

Genesis 19

Despite the clear warning of the flood, soon wickedness again demonstrates that every imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. In Sodom and Gomorrah immorality reaches a new low. God sends fire and brimstone from heaven upon old and young, men and women. Only Lot and his two daughters escape but his wife is turned into a pillar of salt because she longingly looked back. What a shocking sight greeted Abraham when he looked at the once prosperous plain, with its lush grass, its flocks and its herds, and its great cities, but now, *'the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace'* (Gen 19:28)! Fear God!

Job

Job was a perfect man, one that feared God and eschewed evil, but the Lord puts His people through the fires of trial so that they will emerge as gold. Job lost all his great wealth in one day along with his seven sons and three daughters. This was followed by illness, then by his wife advising him to commit suicide and then by his friends saying he must be guilty of some great wickedness to suffer so much. Poor Job exclaimed: *'Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments'* (Job 23:3-4). God does eventually reveal His glory to Job who cries out, *'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'* (Job 42:5-6). Have we learned Job's lesson?

Exodus 3

Moses, who was the greatest prophet in the Old Testament, first met God at the bush which burned and was not consumed. His curiosity excited, he approached but heard the words: *'Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place where on thou standest is holy ground'* (Ex 3:5). Terrified, Moses hid his face. Beware of approaching this great God without an invitation or you will die.

Exodus 5

Pharaoh the king of Egypt was used to being honoured and arrogantly responded to Moses' request to free the children of Israel with the words: *'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go'* (Ex 5:2). Ten plagues later he was desperate to let Israel go and loaded them with gifts to hasten their departure. He wouldn't let them wait till their dough was leavened. Who can resist this Jehovah?

Exodus 19-20

God descended on Mount Sinai in the presence of all Israel. The mountain smoked and shook and burned with fire and Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. God spoke forth His Ten Commandments in the ears of all Israel and the people said to Moses, *'Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die'* (Ex 20:19). He is a God of awesome majesty.

Leviticus 10

Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, offered strange fire to the Lord, i.e. worship which had not been commanded. They did not simply receive a warning or some temporary punishment but were capitally punished by God. God's fire burned them up. Aaron was not even allowed to mourn. *'Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled'* (Lev 10:6). God in His majesty lays down how He is to be worshipped. An earnest, willing heart is not enough. *'Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount'* (Heb 8:5). How frightening God is!

Numbers 20

Although Moses was the meekest man that ever lived he was exasperated by the constant grumbling of the Israelites. They wanted water and God told him to speak to the rock but he struck

it exclaiming, *'Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?'* God responded, *'Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them'* (Numb 20:10, 12). Although Moses was a great man of God who spoke to the Almighty face to face as a man to his friend yet when he sinned he must be punished and God has not changed.

Joshua 7

Jericho as the first city conquered in the promised land was to be given as a sacrifice to God by God's commandment, the first-fruits of the land. But a man called Achan saw there a wedge of gold, some silver and a Babylonish garment and took it for himself and hid it under his tent. As a result Israel lost its next battle at Ai and could have no future till the sin was dealt with. The Holy Lord God would not return to help Israel till Achan and his family were stoned to death and burnt with fire. It might seem a small sin but no sin against an infinitely great God is small.

2 Samuel 6

The Ark of the Covenant was kept at the house of Abinadab. David wanted to take it to the place which he had prepared for it in Jerusalem. The ark was placed on a new cart and the sons of Abinadab, Uzzah and Ahio drove the cart. At a certain point the oxen shook the cart and Uzzah, afraid that the ark would fall off and land in the mud, put out his hand to steady the ark but was immediately struck down dead. David was shocked and frightened. We might think that was a bit harsh. Did not Uzzah mean well? But meaning well is not enough. Only the priests should touch the ark. It should never have been placed on a cart in the first place. God is holy and lays down how He is to be worshipped and served. Any deviation from this brings His wrath upon us.

Isaiah 6

In Isaiah 6 we have the call of Isaiah to be a prophet. He is shown the throne of God high and lifted up with His glory filling the house. Above the throne stand the seraphim each with six wings, two to cover their faces from the dazzling brightness of God's glory, two to cover their feet in modesty and two with which to fly and carry out the errands of God. *'And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke'* (Is 6:3-4). What majesty! The effect on Isaiah was immediate. He cried out *'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts'* (v 5). He felt overwhelmed with guilt and shame. One of the seraphim took a live coal from off the altar and applied it to his lips. Without that altar and the application of the blood of Christ, Isaiah along with us would perish. What better preparation for His ministry, and indeed for life, than a vision of the transcendent glory of God!

Matthew

Many think of the God of the Old Testament as awesome and terrifying and the God of the New Testament as love, but there is only one God. And He doesn't change. His love was revealed to our first parents in the garden of Eden with the promise of the coming Seed who would save from the serpent. His love was revealed in delivering Noah, Lot, Abraham, David and others in Old Testament times. We find frightening words in the New Testament coming from the lips of Jesus, for example with reference to the Judgment Day: *'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity'* (Mt 7:22-23). In Matthew 23 the Son of God pronounces terrible curses upon the Pharisees and hypocrites. Nowhere is the majesty of God revealed more clearly than on the cross. Jesus pleads in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering, if at all possible, be removed from Him. Beloved Son though He was, the cup was not removed. There is no other way of salvation for mankind. Divine justice must be satisfied. The wages of sin is death and therefore a substitute must die the cursed death of the cross. Our Saviour experienced the depths of hell when He cried, *'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'* (Mt 27:46). How awesome is the holiness, justice and love of God!

Acts 5

Sudden judgments do not just belong to the Old Testament. Ananias and Sapphira his wife had sold land. They pretended that they gave the full price which they had received to the church. Peter challenged first Ananias and then, separately, his wife. They both lied and were struck down dead. This God of the New Testament is still the God of today.

Hebrews 12:29

There are many warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews against backsliding and falling away: *'See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth',* that is Moses, *'much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven'* (Heb 12:25-26). The judgments which will come on people of New Testament times will be far worse than those which came in the Old Testament. Remember, our duty is to *'serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire'* (vv 28-29).

Revelation

When the godly old John saw the risen exalted Lord he fell at his feet as if dead (Rev. 1:17). In chapter 4 John is given a vision into heaven which is reminiscent of Isaiah 6. He sees the wicked on the Judgment Day praying to the mountains and rocks, *'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?'* (6:16-17). What an awesome prayer-meeting that will be! In Revelation 20 the great white throne is portrayed. Heaven and earth flee away from the face of the one who sits on the throne. All mankind who live or ever lived are gathered before it. There is no escape. *'And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'* (20:15). Nowhere do we see a more frightening picture for the unbeliever. We are also told of the blessings in store for the child of God: *'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away'* (21:4). Don't wait till the Judgment Day to submit to God.

Conclusion

God is the infinite, eternal, all-knowing Creator, Ruler and Judge. Sinners must repent and make their peace with Him or perish forever in the torment of hell. Christians must walk softly before Him, remembering that He is a consuming fire. He is to be served with reverence and godly fear. While Christ has suffered for our sins and we will not be punished for them, as a Father God will chastise us for our sins and His chastisements really hurt. We exist not for our own glory or pleasure but to glorify Him. Love Him, fear Him, worship Him and obey Him.

William Macleod

©2017

www.christianstudylibrary.org