

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Andrew Wommack

One of the most important things about relationship is to understand the person with whom you're going to have relationship, and that also applies to God. You need to understand the basic nature and character of God in order to have a healthy relationship with Him. Misunderstanding His character and nature is one of the reasons many people don't have a positive relationship with Him. This is exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent. They entered into temptation, ultimately disobeyed God, and plunged the whole human race into sin. This is actually a part of the temptation.

The story in Genesis 3:1-5 is familiar to most people: "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [God], knowing good and evil."

There is a subtle statement by Satan here that God is not really a good God . . . that He was trying to withhold something from Adam and Eve . . . that He didn't want them to reach their full potential . . . that He didn't want them to be like Himself . . . and that the reason He made the rule about not eating of the tree of life was to hinder or hurt them. In a sense, Satan came against the very nature and character of God when he maligned Him and said God did not want the best for them. The same thing is exactly what's happening to people today. Satan tells them, "If you follow God and don't experiment with all these things that are contrary to His Word, you'll never experience true happiness. Life will be boring . . . dead. The sad fact is that people experience after the fact that the drugs, alcohol, sex, rebellion, indulgence of self, success in jobs, and all the other things they tried didn't satisfy them. By the time they realize it, they've already destroyed their lives, their families, and their health.

The truth is that God is a good God, and His will for us is only good. But Satan uses the same temptations on us today that came against Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, basically implying that God is not a good God. Those who have only a little understanding of the Bible could get that impression because there are instances in the Word where He treated people in harsh, cruel ways. In Numbers 15:32-36, a man picked up sticks on the Sabbath Day and was stoned to death for failing to observe the Sabbath. That sounds harsh, but there was a purpose behind such punishments, though it's not obvious to most people in a casual reading of Scripture. Careful study reveals that Old Testament law was given to make the sin that we've committed become exceedingly sinful, as Paul says in Romans 7:13. The purpose was that people didn't realize how deadly their transgressions were and that they were an offense against God. They made the mistake of comparing among themselves and measuring their actions by what other people were doing.

If someone committed a sin and wasn't struck dead, they thought sin must not be so bad, and they lowered their standards. They had lost the true perspective on what right and wrong was. God had to bring mankind back to a plumb line, a proper standard of what right living was, so they would reject the devil and his temptations and recognize what the end result of their wrong choices would be. Then when He did that, He had to enforce the law He gave.

God did not give the Old Testament commandments for the purpose of saying, "Until you do all these things, I can't accept you or love you." That is not His nature or character. Rather, He gave them to make our sense of right and wrong more acute and to bring us back to the fact that we need a Savior. The problem has been that people thought God was demanding perfection before He could love them, which led to the attitude many have that His love for them is directly proportional to their performance. They feel that until they try to do everything exactly right, they will not be accepted by God, and that is not the message of the Bible.

There are many illustrations of this in the Word. There is an example in John 8 where a woman was taken in the very act of adultery and brought to Jesus for judgment. The people who brought her weren't really trying to get a proper judgment from him but were using the situation to entrap Him. John 8:3-7 says, "And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They said unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.'"

They were trying to get Jesus to carry out the Old Testament commandment to stone a person taken in the act of adultery. To show they weren't sincere in trying to get a proper judgment but were trying to entrap Him, the Bible says that she was taken in the very act of adultery (which means a man had to be present), but they didn't bring the man. They brought her, knowing Jesus had been preaching that God loves us even if we have sinned and fallen short and wants to extend mercy to us. They knew the woman would solicit sympathy from Jesus. If He failed to pass the judgment prescribed in the Law, they would be able to kill Him. If He did execute the judgment and stoned her, His followers would leave Him because His message of mercy, grace, and forgiveness would be compromised.

They thought this was a no-win situation for Jesus, but He ignored them, reached down, and began writing on the ground. When they asked Him again, he got up, said the person without sin should cast the first stone, and they began to be convicted by their own consciences. Scripture doesn't tell exactly what He wrote, but I believe He was making some kind of statement. Perhaps He was writing some of their secret sins, using His supernatural ability to look into their hearts to know what they were thinking. Whatever He wrote, they were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit that they weren't without sin, and they left.

He said to the woman in John 8:10-11, “Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.” Jesus didn’t condone her sin but told her to go and sin no more, extending mercy to her. Contrast this to the Old Testament that says the woman should have been killed and shown no mercy. Jesus was God manifested in the flesh. This same God that gave the commandment to stone a person to death and show them no mercy turned and showed mercy to a person taken in the very act of adultery.

That appears to be contradictory, as though there are two different Gods. Will the God of the Old Testament or the God of the New Testament be the God we serve? The truth is that the Bible says Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God has never changed. His love for mankind has never changed. He has always sought to reconcile mankind to Himself, and the Old Testament Law with its harshness was not a true representation of Him. It was true in the sense of justice, but it didn’t reveal the mercy and the heart of God. Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus was the express image (exact representation) of the Father, a perfect manifestation of God’s heart, and He shows us His real heart.

God’s heart is to reconcile mankind to Himself not to judge them . . . not to impute their sins . . . not to hold their sins against them. That’s the heart of God for people in the Bible and also His heart for us today. We need to understand His real heart, that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). He seeks to take away your sins and anything that would separate you from Him. He’s already done it through Jesus, and He’s offering you relationship today, not based on your performance but on your faith and acceptance of Jesus bearing your sins. You can have relationship with God today regardless of the failures in your life. All He asks is that you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you as you consider that today.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (Outline)

1. People need to understand the nature of God. Relationship with someone takes understanding.
2. Satan still causes us to doubt God's character.

Genesis 3:5: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

3. God is a good God.

A. God is full of mercy.

B. His will for us is only good.

John 8:3-10: "And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, ⁴They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. ⁵Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? ⁶This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. ⁷So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. ⁸And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. ⁹And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?"

4. The purpose of the law:

A. To show how deadly sin is (to do so, the law needed to be enforced).

B. Not to please God but to know right from wrong.

C. To show the need for a Savior.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (Teacher's Guide)

1. According to Genesis 3:1-5, how did the serpent (Satan) tempt Eve?

By causing her to question the goodness of God and His Word.
2. According to Genesis 3:9-10, did God still have communication/relationship with Adam and Eve after they sinned?

Yes.
3. A. Why did God drive Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden?
See Genesis 3:22-24.

So that they would not eat of the tree of life and live forever in a fallen state.

B. Can you see that this was an act of mercy by God rather than only a punishment?

Yes!
4. A. How did God deal with the first murderer, Cain?
See Genesis 4:8-15.

He pardoned and protected him.

B. Can you see that God also dealt with Cain in mercy and grace?

Yes!
5. A. How did sin enter the world?
See Romans 5:12.

Through Adam's sin.

B. How do we receive God's grace?
See Romans 5:17.

Through Jesus Christ, as a gift.
6. Can you see from the Bible that God has desired a relationship with man from the beginning, and has continued to reach out to us in grace and mercy?

Yes!

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (Detailed Teacher's Guide)

Note: The following information may be read out loud (a numbered section at a time) with the person(s) being disciplined. After each numbered section is read, pause and ask the question(s) that correspond to the paragraph(s), and then discuss them.

¹ One of the most important elements of any relationship is understanding the person that you have a relationship with; that applies to God too. You have to understand the basic nature and character of God to have a healthy relationship with Him. Misunderstanding the nature and character of God is one of the reasons that many people don't have a positive relationship with the Lord.

² The truth is that God is a good God, and His will for us is only good. Satan uses the same temptations on us today that he used against Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-5). He's basically saying that God is not a good God. If people just have a casual understanding of the Bible, they could get this impression because there are examples in the Word where God's dealings seemed harsh and cruel. These examples of the Old Testament law were given to make sin (the sin that we had committed) become exceedingly sinful. The purpose of this was to make people aware of how deadly their transgressions were. Because of a loss of perspective of what was right and wrong, God had to bring mankind back to a plumb line, a proper standard of what right living was so that they could reject the devil, his temptations, and recognize what the end result of these wrong choices would be.

³ Although God did give us the laws (Old Testament commandments), they were not given for the purpose of qualifying us for God's love and acceptance. That's not the nature and character of God. Rather, He did this to make our sense of right and wrong become accurate and to bring us back to a sense that we need a Savior. The problem is that people thought God was demanding perfection before He could love and accept them. That is not the message of the Bible.

¹ What does Psalms 86:5 reveal about God's goodness?

² (a) According to Romans 6:23 the wages of our sins earn us what?

(b) The free gift that God offers is what?

³ (a) According to Galatians 2:21, can the righteousness that we need be derived through keeping the law?

(b) What was the true purpose of God giving the law, according to Galatians 3:24?

(c) According to Romans 10:3-4, if we go about to establish our own righteousness before God, what do we fail to do?

⁴ Jesus' willingness to forgive a woman caught in adultery seems contradictory to the Old Testament law, which demanded death for adultery. It looks like there are two different Gods. Will the God of the Old Testament or the God of the New Testament be the one that we serve? The truth is, God has never changed. His love for mankind has never changed. God has always sought to reconcile mankind unto Himself. The Old Testament law, with the harshness and punishment, was not the truest representation of God. The Bible says in Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus is the express image of the Father. That means an exact representation—a perfect display—a perfect manifestation of God's heart. Jesus showed us the real heart of God in forgiving others.

⁵ God's heart is to reconcile mankind unto Himself not to judge them or impute their sins to them. That's the heart of God for the people in the Bible, and that's also the heart of God for us today. We need to understand the real heart of God. First John 4:8 says that God is love, and God seeks to take our sins away and anything else that would separate us from Him. He's already done it through the Lord Jesus, and He's offering you a relationship today not based on good works or your performance, but on your faith and acceptance of Jesus baring your sins. You can have a relationship with God today regardless of the failures in your life. All God is asking you to do is put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴What does 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 reveal about God's desire for each of us?

⁵What does Hebrews 8:7-13 reveal that the New Covenant will do?

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (Discipleship Questions)

Read Genesis 3:1-5.

1. In verse 1, what question did Satan ask Eve?
2. Compare Genesis 2:17 with Genesis 3:3. What one word did Eve add to what God actually said to Adam?
3. Once Satan was able to instill doubt into Eve's mind regarding the Word of God, what did she do in Genesis 3:6?

Read Genesis 3:9-10.

4. After Adam and Eve sinned, did God still communicate and pursue a relationship with them?

Read Genesis 3:22-24.

5. Why did God drive Adam and Eve from the garden?
6. Can you see that this was an act of mercy by God rather than only a punishment?

Read Genesis 4:8-15.

7. Is Cain surprised at the way God is speaking to him? _____
8. Does it seem like they had a relationship where they talked all the time? _____
9. When Cain killed his brother, was God merciful or vengeful toward Cain?
10. In verse 14, Cain is seeing the possible consequences for his actions and worries that someone might also want to take his life. What did God do for Cain in verse 15?
11. Can you see that God also dealt with Cain graciously and mercifully just as He did with Adam and Eve?
12. Was God's nature loving or wrathful toward those who sinned against Him?

Read Romans 5:12-19.

13. How did sin enter the world?
14. Who was the "one man" spoken of in this verse? _____

15. In verse 15, who was the “gift”?
16. In verse 16, 18 and 19, What was the outcome of one man’s sin (Adam)?
- A. J_____
 - B. C_____
 - C. S_____
 - D. Dis_____
17. In the same verses as above, what was the result of One man’s gift?
- A. G_____
 - B. J_____
 - C. Gift of r_____
 - D. E_____ (verse 21)

Read Romans 5:17.

18. How do we attain God’s abundance of grace and gift of righteousness?
- A. Buy
 - B. Earn
 - C. Receive

Read Psalm 86:5.

19. For You, Lord, are _____, and ready to _____,
- And abundant in _____, to _____ who _____ upon You.

Read Romans 6:23.

20. What do we really deserve if we sin?
21. By grace what does God give to us instead?

Read Galatians 3:24.

22. If the purpose of the law wasn’t to earn righteousness, what was its purpose?
23. What was the result of coming to Christ?
24. How was this attained?

Read Romans 10:3.

25. If we try to establish our own righteousness before God, what do we fail to do?
26. Verse 4, "For _____ is the _____ of the law of righteousness to _____ who _____."

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

27. What has God given to each of us through Jesus Christ?
- A. _____ us to Himself (verse 18).
- B. given us the Ministry of _____ (verse 18).
- C. Did not _____ our trespasses against us (verse 19).
- D. We are _____ for Christ (verse 20).

Read Hebrews 8:7-13.

28. In verse 10, what is the covenant God will make or His people?
29. What is the outcome of having God's laws on our minds and our hearts? (v 11)
30. How will God react to our sins and unrighteousness? (v 12)
31. In verse 13, what has happened to the first covenant, the law?

Read Hebrews 8:12, Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 55:7, Jeremiah 33:8, Micah 7:18, and 1 John 1:9.

32. What does God promise to do with all our sins and iniquities against Him if we would only believe?
33. What does this tell you about the character of God?
34. If sin is what keeps us from having a relationship with God, can you see that God so desires to have a relationship with you by His actions?

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
(Discipleship Answer Key)

1. Has God indeed said
2. That they shouldn't touch it
3. Took and ate of the tree
4. Yes
5. So they wouldn't eat from the tree of life
6. Yes
7. No
8. Yes
9. Merciful
10. Set a mark on Cain to protect him from someone killing him.
11. Yes
12. Loving
13. Through one man
14. Adam
15. Jesus Christ
16. A. Judgment
B. Condemnation
C. Sin
D. Disobedience
17. A. Grace
B. Justification
C. Gift of righteousness
D. Eternal life
18. C. Receive
19. Good – Forgive – Mercy – All – Call
20. Death
21. Eternal life in Jesus
22. A tutor to bring us to Christ
23. Justification
24. By faith
25. Submit to God
26. Christ – end – everyone – believes
27. A. Reconciled
B. Reconciliation
C. Impute
D. Ambassadors
28. Put My laws in their minds, write them on their hearts. He will be our God, we shall be His people
29. We won't have need to teach one another
30. Merciful – remembering our sins no more
31. Obsolete
32. Remove them, forget them, forgive them
33. Merciful and loving
34. Yes

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

By Andrew Wommack
(Additional Information)

Is God Schizophrenic?

One reason God can be so easily discredited is because people don't really know Him by His Word. The only way you can truly know anything about God is through the Bible. Everybody on the earth has an opinion about what God is like and what He will do. But the only thing He gave us to know Him—and the only source that is truly reliable—is His written Word.

There are a lot of passages in the Bible that appear to give a “schizophrenic” revelation of God. Of course, God is not schizophrenic, but that is the way it appears to some people from a casual reading of the Scriptures.

In one scripture, God commands you to be stoned to death for picking up sticks on the Sabbath day (see Numbers 15:32-35), and then in another, He forgives and does not condemn a woman caught in the very act of adultery (see John 8:3-11). Examples like that have given people a rather strange impression of who God is.

The Old Testament Is Incomplete

In the Old Testament, we see a picture of God that is incomplete. It is not incorrect; it is just incomplete. People who create their understanding of the nature of God only from the Old Testament usually do not end up with a fully accurate picture. The Old Testament is only a partial picture; it is not a perfect representation of God. Unless you understand the New Testament and are able to harmonize it with the Old Testament, you are going to end up with a misunderstanding of the love of God and the whole nature of God.

One night I had a dream that I was Joshua in the Old Testament. I was going into the Promised Land, and God had commanded me to kill everybody in all of the cities, just like He commanded Joshua. That was hard for me to do! No women, children, or anything that breathed were to be left alive. But I couldn't justify it. I was nearly to the point of saying, “God, I just can't do it.”

To make the situation worse, I discovered that one of my very best friends was in one of these cities, and I was supposed to kill him, his wife, and his kids. I woke up from the dream thinking, “God, I can't do it. God, there's no way I can do it.” I thought about the dream all morning, meditating on it and praying about it. I was thinking, “God, how could these things have happened?”

My answer was found by looking at the Old Testament through the revelation of the New Testament. God began to show me that if Jesus had lived in His human form in the Old Testament, He would not have done things the way Joshua did. That is not to say that Joshua was wrong. He was obedient to God, and God was operating in the manner He had to operate during that time period.

Still, all that God did through Joshua was not a true and complete representation of His nature. Nor was it whom God has revealed Himself to be to believers in the New Testament. And yet some people have the impression that God is a God of wrath who will wipe out anyone who gets in His way.

Under the Old Testament, you see some things being done in that manner, but that is not the whole nature of God. It is vital to know who it is we are really dealing with. If you don't know God's nature or really understand Him, then you'll never effectively walk in the blessings and the power of God.

Old Testament Judgment

In 1 Kings 21:1-24, Ahab and Jezebel are probably two of the most wicked people in history, and certainly the most corrupt king and queen of Israel. They conspired together to kill an innocent man named Naboth in order to acquire his vineyard. They had Naboth stoned to death and his body thrown into a field, where the dogs came and licked up his blood. While Ahab was walking through his new vineyard, he saw Elijah the prophet and said, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

Elijah replied, "I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

Then Elijah began to rebuke Ahab and said, "Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel."

It took awhile for those prophecies to come to pass. Ahab was killed in battle, and when he was brought home, the people went to wash out his chariot. As they were washing it, the dogs came and licked up Ahab's blood (see 1 King 22:38).

As for Jezebel, when a man named Jehu became king, she was thrown out of a tower and landed on the ground by the wall. Jehu rode his chariot back and forth across her, mutilating her body. Then he went into the palace, sat down, and began to eat. Right in the middle of his meal, he said something like, "Well, she's a king's daughter, and even though she was a wicked woman, she ought to be buried."

So Jehu sent some people out to bury her, but all that was left was her head, hands, and feet. The rest of her had been eaten by dogs! (See 2 Kings 9:30-37). Elijah's awesome prophecies came to pass exactly the way he had said—so you wouldn't want to mess with Elijah, right?

In 2 Kings, chapter one, we move on to the story of Ahaziah, the son of Ahab. Ahab and Jezebel had sinned against God in such a terrible way that their lives ended. Ahaziah had seen those prophecies fulfilled, but he didn't like Elijah any more than his parents had.

Ahaziah was following in the footsteps of his parents. He wasn't seeking the one true God; he was seeking after pagan gods. When he gets sick, instead of seeking God and inquiring of Him for healing, Ahaziah sent messengers to Baalzebub, the god of Ekron.

According to 2 Kings 1:3-8, when Ahaziah's messengers were on their way to inquire of this pagan god, Elijah met them and said:

“Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? ⁴Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed.⁵And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back? ⁶And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say to him, Thus saith the Lord, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. ⁷And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?⁸And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.”

The king knew it was Elijah and he was seized with fear, so he sent his armies out to capture him. Verses 9 and 10 say,

“Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. ¹⁰And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.”

That's pretty strong, isn't it? You just didn't "mess" with Elijah. Ahaziah sent out an army—fifty men and a captain over them—to take Elijah, but Elijah called fire down out of heaven and destroyed the king's men. Continuing in verses 11 and 12:

“Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. ¹²And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.”

That's 102 men! Somebody might say, “Well, Satan must have done that.” But it says in verse 12 that it was the fire of God that came down from heaven. Elijah had access to the power of God to such a degree that he could consume people. He could kill people with the power and the anointing of God. This is similar to Revelation 11:5, where it says the two witnesses will have the power of fire coming out of their mouths, destroying anybody who stands against God.

God, in defense of Elijah, released fire from heaven and killed 102 men. Finally, the third captain and his fifty men came, but this captain was a God-fearing man. A paraphrase of what he said is, “Have mercy on me. All I'm doing is what the king told me to do.” So God told Elijah to go down with him to Ahaziah.

God protected Elijah, and he wasn't touched by any of the king's men. He didn't have to call fire down out of heaven to strike anybody else. Did you know that's not the only way Elijah could have handled the problem? This is an Old Testament example of the power, the anointing, and the wrath of God in defense of one of His prophets.

New Testament Grace

Now let's compare this story of Elijah with Luke 9:51-53:

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. ⁵³And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.”

It had been commanded by God that Jerusalem be the center of worship for the Jews (see 2 Chronicles 6:6). That's where He put His temple and where the ark of the covenant was located. God had commanded His people to worship Him only in Jerusalem.

There was a time when the children of Israel rebelled against God, and He allowed the northern ten tribes to be taken into captivity by the Assyrians. The two southern tribes, Benjamin and Judah, remained undisturbed on the land because they had maintained worship in Jerusalem.

After the northern tribes were taken captive, the king of Assyria sent colonists from Assyria to inhabit the land of the northern ten tribes so the fields wouldn't go to waste. These colonists intermarried with the remnant of the ten tribes who had remained behind. The remnant of the northern tribes forsook their identity as Jews and intermarried with the Assyrian pagans, in direct disobedience to God's commandment not to marry people who did not worship Him.

Because the Assyrians didn't know the ways of God, the beasts of the field began to multiply. The Bible says in 2 Kings, chapter 17, that God sent lions among them. The people were being killed and devoured. The Promised Land that was a blessing of abundance to the Jews now began to produce beasts that were devouring the Assyrians.

Word of this situation was sent to the King of Assyria. He released some of the Israelite priests to return to the Promised Land and teach the Assyrians the ways of the God of Israel. If they pleased God, they would not be consumed by the wild animals.

The Assyrian colonists began to learn the outward practices to please God, but they didn't change their hearts. They were still pagan worshipers and they incorporated their pagan practices into the Israelite rituals. They did the necessary things to appease God and get rid of the wild animals, but it was not pure worship of God.

As a result, the northern tribes became a mixed race of people called Samaritans, which led to racial problems in Israel. The devout Jews who were living in Jerusalem hated the Samaritans who had corrupted worship. This is verified in John, chapter 4, where Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. There was a tremendous hatred involving religious and racial prejudice between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans at all.

By Luke, chapter 9, Jesus had already ministered to the Samaritans. He had seen the entire city of Samaria respond to Him. They had accepted Him as Messiah. But now, when He came through their town, they would not receive Him because it looked like He was going to Jerusalem to worship with “those hypocrites down there.” The Samaritans rejected Jesus because of racial prejudice.

To reject Jesus under those conditions was pretty serious, and His disciples, James and John, had a knee-jerk, Old Testament reaction:

“And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did” (Luke 9:54).

Certainly James and John were as justified in wanting to kill the Samaritans for their rejection of Jesus, as Elijah was justified in calling fire down out of heaven to kill the soldiers who had rejected the God of Israel in 2 Kings 1:10 and 12. This was a serious rejection of the Lord Jesus, and they were simply imitating Elijah, a great man of God.

The two disciples were taking a scriptural example, acting on the Word of God, and doing what Elijah did. Yet how did Jesus respond to His loyal, zealous disciples?

“But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:55-56).

Jesus rebuked James and John for trying to do what was done under the Old Testament. He rebuked them for trying to be like Elijah, one of the most powerful men of God who ever lived under the Old Testament. Does that mean Elijah was sinning in 2 Kings, chapter 1? No, because at that time, God was dealing with man in a different way, the only way He could at the time.

Harmonizing Old and New Testaments

When people don’t look at the whole Word of God, examining the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, they generally get an Old Testament picture of God as a God of wrath, judgment, and punishment. That is a truth about God, and those who don’t accept the love and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ will one day experience a terrible day of God’s judgment. But wrath and judgment are not the essential nature of God.

God’s nature is not judgment. You can’t find that in the Word of God. He does judge, and He is just and holy, but Scripture reveals to us in 1 John 4:8 that “God is love.” Love is God’s real nature. He doesn’t just have love or operate in love. God is love. Love is the true character of God.

Elijah’s actions in obedience to God were not the complete representation of the nature of God, and the Old Testament cannot give us a total revelation of God by itself. We need the New Testament to understand the fullness of God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,14).

“Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father” (John 14:9).

Jesus is the walking, living Word, and when we see Him, we see the Father. So the problem many Christians are facing in knowing God is that they are seeing God through the Old Testament instead of through Jesus. They misunderstand and are confused about who God really is and the relationship He wants with them because they see Him according to the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, God had to deal with mankind and sin in a different manner. But when Jesus came, He brought the true revelation of the Father to mankind, and He operated very differently.

I personally believe if Jesus had come to earth in His human form in Old Testament times, He would have rebuked Elijah, Joshua never would have killed every man, woman, and child in those cities in the land of Canaan, and Moses would have been rebuked for a lot of the things he did.

You may be thinking, Brother, how can you say such things? I believe it's clear in the Word of God that it never was God's desire to have to deal with mankind so firmly. That never was His real nature and character. But because we haven't known this, we have a mixed impression of God. We haven't seen Him in His fullness.

Most of us don't really recognize or understand the depth of the love, mercy, and compassion God has toward us. And this mistaken impression of God keeps us at arm's length from Him. That's why it is so important to harmonize all of the Word of God. Only then can you get a firm understanding of His true nature.

Grace Extended After the Fall

Most people's concept of God is that the moment sin entered the Garden of Eden, the wrath of God began to be released upon mankind. People believe that God was holy and man was unholy, so therefore God separated man from Himself and drove Adam and Eve from His presence because His holiness could not stand to look upon sinful flesh. But there was a period of time from Adam until Moses when God dealt with people out of love, mercy, and forgiveness instead of wrath and judgment.

Now, of course, I believe God is holy, and I know that man is sinful, but God's love is so great that He did not just expel man from His presence. As a whole, God dealt in mercy toward man, and He did not impute their sins (hold those sins against them) until the days of Moses, when the Law was given.

Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve fell to the temptation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Let's take a good look at how God dealt with them.

“And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: ²³Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Genesis 3:22-23).

When you see the word “therefore,” you’re always supposed to look and see what it’s there for. So “therefore” means this verse is tying in with what was said previously.

“Therefore” links the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden with what was just said. What would happen if God didn’t send them out? The reason God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden was because He didn’t want them to eat of the Tree of Life, which would mean all of mankind would live forever in their sinfulness. It was not because God couldn’t tolerate mankind.

Adam and Eve transgressed against God, but God did not expel them from His presence. The presence of God went with Adam and Eve and their descendants outside the Garden of Eden. I’m going to show you that even after Adam and Eve sinned and left the Garden, God was still walking and talking with them in the cool of the evening. He was still fellowshiping and present with sinful mankind.

The reason God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden was because He loved them so much, He didn’t want them to partake of the Tree of Life and live forever in a body that was corrupted by sin. Sin gave Satan the opportunity to put sickness, disease, and all kinds of curses on us. Can you imagine what it would be like to live for all eternity with diseases destroying your body, yet you couldn’t die from them? It was God’s mercy that sent mankind out of the Garden and away from the Tree of Life.

For a person who knows God and accepts His provision, there is a glorious, glorified body coming that won’t be subject to the things this earthly body is subject to now in this life. There’s coming a body that’s better than Adam and Eve had before they sinned. God sent them out of the Garden because He didn’t want them to live forever in a corrupted body, subject to all of the things we are subject to because of sin. In Genesis, chapter 4, we see that God was still fellowshiping with mankind after the Fall, outside the Garden. We know that because God was talking to Cain and Abel. How did Cain and Abel know to bring a sacrifice? How did they know to bring a blood sacrifice and give the first fruits of their labor to God?

Adam and Eve didn’t have blood sacrifices explained to them in the Garden because they had no transgressions to atone for yet. The Bible doesn’t say this outright, but it’s evident to me that God was still talking with Adam and Eve and with Cain and Abel. He was talking and communicating with them because they understood about sacrifices and how to approach Him.

After Cain and Abel offered their sacrifices, Genesis 4:5 says, “But unto Cain and to his offering he [God] had not respect.” It says God did not respect Cain’s offering. How did they know God did not respect Cain’s offering?

If you and your brother came and offered a sacrifice today, how would you know which one God respected and which one God didn’t? As born-again Christians, we have a witness of God in our spirits. But Cain and Abel weren’t born-again Christians, so they didn’t have God inside them. It’s evident that God was talking to them. They were aware that God was walking, talking, and fellowshiping with them because in verse 6 it says, “The Lord said unto Cain.”

Here we have God speaking in an audible voice to Cain just the same as God did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

“And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? ⁷If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Genesis 4:6-7).

God talked face-to-face with Cain and Abel. As I stated earlier, most people thought God had to separate man from His presence because man was unholy and God was so holy that there could be no fellowship. That’s the concept most people have developed, but it’s not proven or taught by Scripture.

When Cain saw that God respected Abel’s sacrifice more than his, he was overcome with jealousy and killed Abel in anger. The Bible shows us that God spoke to Cain about it.

“And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper” (Genesis 4:9).

Now stop and think about this. Here’s the very first murderer on the face of the earth and, while he still had the blood of Abel on his hands, an audible voice from God out of heaven said, “Where is Abel, your brother?”

What would you do if you just murdered somebody, still had the murder weapon in your hand, and God spoke to you in an audible voice? You would probably die of a heart attack! You might do a lot of things, but you wouldn’t just turn around and say, “I don’t know where he is, God. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Do you know why Cain did that? Because he was used to talking to God. He talked to God every day. It wasn’t unusual. There had to be a familiarity with the audible voice of God. God was still walking and talking with man even after sin entered the world and mankind was expelled from the Garden of Eden. He was not imputing sin or holding their trespasses against them. God was not treating them the way the Old Testament Law reveals sin should be treated. He was operating in love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Still, God showed His disapproval of Cain’s killing of Abel and let Cain know what the consequences would be.

“And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand; ¹²When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” (Genesis 4:11-12).

Cain became fearful, and in Genesis 4:14 he said, “God, I’m going to be a vagabond, wandering throughout the earth, and everybody who finds me is going to try to kill me.” Do you know what God did? Instead of bringing judgment on the very first murderer on the face of the earth, God put a mark upon Cain and protected him.