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INTRODUCTION.

Did you know that if a person really knew God and understood God as the wonderful Father He is, there would be no trouble believing Him and His Word?

There has been a great emphasis in the body of Christ in recent years on teaching faith and confessing His Word to bring faith. I believe in speaking what God's Word says, and believers need to have faith in God. But I also believe that an important key has been missed.

Having faith in others means developing relationship with them to the point where you know them so well, you just completely trust them.

A minister friend of mine once said that as he carries his little girl around, she never has to say, "I confess with my mouth and believe in my heart that my dad will not drop me. And I confess with my mouth and believe in my heart that my dad's going to feed me." For that daughter, there is no striving to believe that her father is going to be good to her; she just rests and relaxes in her loving relationship with him. She knows he is going to take care of her because she knows him and his character.

In the same way, once we simply get to know God better, we will find it easy to have faith in Him to provide what we need. And since everything we receive from God comes through faith in Him (including our salvation), knowing Him intimately becomes very important! Really, everything we receive from God comes out of knowing Him.

One of the reasons the Christian life has been so hard for a lot of people, and I'm including people who have heard teaching about faith and confession, is because they haven't really developed personal relationship with God. They don't know Him intimately.

When you really know a person is trustworthy, it's not hard to believe him or her. I personally believe that faith is a direct result of knowing God better. It's not hard to believe God and His Word if you really know Him. And when you believe God's Word, it's not hard to receive from Him. But if you don't know God very well, Satan can discredit Him to you and say all kinds of false things about Him that you will just accept.

Before I get into more of this subject, I have to admit to you that I tend to minister by "shock technique." One of the hardest things to get people to do is to pay attention, to really hear what you have to say. So, to get their attention, I say things that paint me into such a corner that they're interested to find out how I'm going to get out of it. They start listening intently, and ultimately they get the point I am trying to make.

The Word of God is simple. A minister I know says it's so simple, you have to have somebody help you misunderstand it. There's nothing hard about the Word of God. The biggest problem is that people don't really hear. People are thinking about what they had for breakfast, where they're going to eat lunch, or about this or that. So, before I explain what I believe the nature of God is, I'm sharing with you that some of my points may seem somewhat dramatic.

For example, A minister I know was teaching at a meeting that God is not the One who puts problems on believers. A man was there with his twelve-year-old daughter, who was a paraplegic

in diapers, paralyzed, and confined to a wheelchair. Her condition was so bad that she couldn't even relate to what was going on around her.

Because the minister had said that God was not the One who put that affliction on his daughter, this man got upset. The people who brought him to the meeting said to him, "You at least owe the minister the courtesy of talking to him after the service and letting him explain himself." Afterwards, the gentleman came up to the minister and said, "God did this to my daughter. She was born this way. This is God's will for her, and He's getting glory out of it."

The minister answered him, "No, God didn't do this. It is not God's will that a girl be in a wheelchair and not be able to function normally. That is not the way God made people." the minister started sharing scriptures with him, and the man started sharing scriptures right back. Each thought the other was misusing his scriptures. It was getting to be a theological standoff, with nobody getting anywhere.

What finally broke the standoff was when the minister looked at the man and said, "What's the matter? Don't you love your daughter? What kind of father are you? Don't you care if your daughter ever gets out of that wheelchair or not? Don't you care if she's ever normal and can run and play?"

Well, if he was mad at the minister before, he really got mad at the minister when the minister said that! He was almost at the point of punching the minister in the face. The man shot back, "I love my daughter! I would do anything for her. I don't have much money, but I would sell anything, I would borrow, I would do whatever I had to do to come up with the money if it was within my power to produce healing in her."

At that point, the minister asked him, "And you think God loves her less? You think God, with all His power, is just going to sit back and withhold His healing from her because He wants to afflict her to teach somebody something?"

You see, that man could argue with the minister's doctrine, but when God was presented as a Father to him, he saw God's will to heal his daughter. When the minister applied the concept of God as a loving, caring Father, the man didn't have anything left to argue about. He saw that God is a good, heavenly Father who doesn't want His daughter paralyzed. It just wiped out all of his anger.

Understanding that God is a good God and that He loves us takes away the effectiveness of Satan's weapons against our faith. You may have been believing and praying for healing, and you know that the Word says, "By whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). You probably know all about faith teaching, how to confess the Word, and all the related principles. Yet you've got this nagging doubt that you can't overcome. It is a fear inside that makes you wonder, Is God really going to heal me?

Did you know that fear would be totally cast out of your thinking if you understood the perfect love of God for you? First John 4:18 says that "perfect love casteth out fear." If people become fearful, wondering if God's will for their lives is actually going to come to pass, then they don't really understand and know God and His immense love.

If God loves you enough to send His only Son to die for you, then doesn't He love you enough to bring about His will in your lives if you are being obedient to Him? You may know some things about God, but if you really knew God's love for you, you wouldn't doubt Him so easily or

question His willingness to help you. He couldn't be discredited so easily if you really understood how much He cares for you. Can you see that?

Our human relationships are imperfect, so they aren't an exact parallel to our relationship with God. I have good enough relationships with some people that if you came to me and told me they were criticizing me and saying negative things about me, I wouldn't believe it. That's because I know them. We have such a good relationship established that if they were upset with me, they would come talk to me about it. I know they would do that, so you just couldn't lie to me about them.

If people told me that my wife, Mary, had been unfaithful to me while I was out ministering, they would just be barking up the wrong tree. I know my wife so well. I know my wife. Somebody may think, Well, brother, you just can't be sure; you never know. Well, if that's your reaction, it just shows the lack of relationship you have with your mate. It is possible to come into relationship with others to the point that you know what they would be like and what they would do in any set of circumstances.

Our relationship with God is no different. He wants us to be assured that we can trust Him to act in our best interests no matter what the situation. And that is what I am talking about: getting to know God so well that no one can talk us out of His goodness toward us.

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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 we 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.

Most Christians don't read God's Word on a regular basis. They just get a little here and a little there, maybe some from a preacher on television and then a little on Sunday morning from their churches. But that is not going to be enough to make a real difference in their lives and, specifically, in their understanding of God and His nature.

Some people do read and study God's Word on a fairly regular basis. But even then, a lot of passages in the Bible appear to give a "schizophrenic" revelation of God. I'm just being honest with you! 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 death by stoning for picking up sticks on the Sabbath day (Numbers 15:32-35), and then in another, He forgives and does not condemn a woman caught in the very act of adultery (John 8:3-11). Examples like that have given people a rather strange impression of who God is.

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS INCOMPLETE.

The Word of God does not contradict itself. There is a perfect harmony to it all. Much of what is in this book purposes to harmonize the Old and New Testaments to reach a better, more complete understanding of the nature of God.

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

Can you imagine you being Joshua in the Old Testament. Can you imagine that you are going into the Promised Land, and God commands you to kill everybody in all of the cities, just like He commanded Joshua. Would that be hard for you to do! No women, children, or anything that could breathe was to be left alive. Could you imagine you justifying it. Could you imagine you not wanting to do it.

To make the situation worse, could you imagine that one of your very best friends was in one of these cities, and I was supposed to kill him, his wife, and his kids. Would you begin to think, God, how could these things have happened?

The 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 during that time period, God was operating in the manner that He had to.

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 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.

Wanting to be great men or women of God, many Christians go back and begin to emulate some of the Old Testament examples. Anytime someone is told they're a prophet or that they have the anointing of a prophet, that person begins to get hard and cruel. They think they are acting like Elijah, an old bony-fingered prophet who would get right in your face and let you have it. People think of Elijah as someone who would rebuke you, lambaste you, starve you out with famine, or burn you out with fire to teach you something.

Now, there are some examples of true prophets who were not hard and cruel, but when people think of the typical prophet, they usually have an impression of someone like Elijah. Young believers who think they are prophets believe that they are God's lightning rod in the earth, they are going to attract all of the judgment and wrath of God and smite people if they get out of line. But that's not a total understanding of the ministry of the prophet, and certainly not of God's nature.

Under the Old Testament, some things were 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 we don't know God's nature or really understand Him, then we'll never effectively walk in the blessings and power of God. I don't care what scriptures we learn or whose teaching we sit under. As I have said before and

will say many times throughout this book, we have to come to a place where we really know God and have intimate relationship with Him.

Religious ideas, arising from a misunderstanding of Scripture, block people from entering into close relationship with God. Many people are really afraid to come before God, because they have been taught or have gotten the impression that He is going to "hit" them with something. So many believers feel they have to bow and scrape and duck every time they come before Him. That's not the relationship God desires or that His Word teaches.

Ahab and Jezebel are probably two of the most wicked people in history, and certainly the most corrupt king and queen of Israel. First Kings 21:1-24 tells the story of how 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 Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, Oh! mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.
1 Kings 21:20.

Elijah rebuked 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" (1 Kings 21:19 and 23).

It took a while for those prophecies to come to pass. Ahab was killed in a battle, and when he was brought home, the people washed out his chariot. As they did, the dogs came and licked up Ahab's blood (1 Kings 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 over 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."

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 (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?

Ahab and Jezebel had sinned against God to such a degree that Elijah had declared the terrible way their lives would end. Ahaziah, their son, had seen those prophecies fulfilled, but he didn't like Elijah any more than his parents had.

Ahaziah was following right in the footsteps of his parents. He wasn't seeking the one true God; he was seeking after pagan gods. When he got sick, instead of seeking God and inquiring of Him for his 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 enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?

Now 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.

And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back?

And 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 unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire 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.

And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?

And 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 was seized with fear, so he sent his armies out to capture him. 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.

And 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.

2 Kings 1:9-10.

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.

Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, Oh! man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.

And 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.

2 Kings 1:11-12.

That's 102 men! Somebody might think, 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? But 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 one in Luke:

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,

And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.

And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.
Luke 9:51-53.

It had been commanded by God that Jerusalem was to be the center of worship for the Jews (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 in 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. This remnant 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 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 had begun 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 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 4 where Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. There was tremendous hatred involving religious and racial prejudices between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans at all.

By Luke 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 His association with the Jews, a rejection based upon religious and racial prejudices.

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 in calling fire down to kill the soldiers who had rejected the God of Israel (2 Kings 1:10-12). 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 had done. 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. For 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 1? No, because at that time, God was dealing with man differently, in y 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. And 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 and 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, Shew 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 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. In the following chapters, we will study the scriptures that tell us that. But when Jesus came, He brought the true revelation of the Father to mankind, and He operated very differently.

I personally believe if that 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 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 that God has toward us. 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 we get a firm understanding of His true nature.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.
Hebrews 1:1-4.

In verse 3, it says Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person. In other words, Jesus is an exact representation of God, His true nature revealed.

In summary, we should know that the love, mercy, and forgiveness God offers us in the New Testament through Jesus Christ were always available to mankind, even in the Old Testament. But man's response to God's goodness in the Old Testament forced Him to deal with mankind more harshly than He desired. As we harmonize the Old and New Testaments, we can see clearly, God is not schizophrenic!