

Introduction

Is God personal? Yes, the God of the Bible is truly a personal God who continuously seeks fellowship with His creation. As opposed to being some sort of clockmaker, who would create and then step back and watch His creation operate, God continues to operate within it. Continuously, throughout His inspired Word, God has tried to have fellowship with His good creation. God, in His sovereign power and will, has created a plan to make sure that His image-bearers could be reconciled to Him personally. God, who revealed His name to us as YHWH, has certainly been a personal God through the ages. God has been, currently is, and always will be a personal being. It is very much essential to His being to be personal. That is the whole story of Scripture. God is loving and personal, He seeks to continuously appeal and establish a relationship with His good creation.

Burning the Bridge

From the very beginning, God has sought to have image-bearers with whom He would have a personal relationship with. In the Garden of Eden, man had it all. We had a paradise in which we did NOT know sickness, death, sorrow, disease, and so forth. Mankind did NOT know these things, mankind was in complete and full fellowship with God. Mankind, however, decided that God did not know best. In Genesis 3:22-23, we read “And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.”¹ The partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not noble, but something that was

¹ Genesis 3:22-23 (NIV)

tragic. It forever alienated God's image bearers from fellowship with Him. Humanity had lost paradise and full fellowship with God. Humanity had managed to alienate themselves from God as they began to gain knowledge themselves. Instead of trusting the most intelligent, sovereign, and glorious God for understanding what is good and evil, they took it upon themselves to make those judgments themselves.

Consciousness

Reformed theologian John Calvin writes

For as God at first formed us in His own image, that He might elevate our minds to the pursuit of virtue, and the contemplation of eternal life, so to prevent us from heartlessly burying those noble qualities which distinguish us from the lower animals, it is of importance to know that we were endued with reason and intelligence, in order that we might cultivate a holy and honourable life, and regard a blessed immortality as our destined aim.²

Calvin is pointing out that God formed us in His image, because He wanted a personal relationship with us. God formed us in His image in order for us to understand that which is good and have eternal life with Him. We are endowed with reason and intelligence, as God is. God made us in His image with comprehension and understanding of who He is. Our consciousness differs significantly from the other living things upon God's fine green Earth. God continuously strives for us to have a personal relationship with Him. He did not abandon us when we sinned, His desire has always been to have a personal relationship with us.

Calvin goes on to say

At the same time, it is impossible to think of our primeval dignity without being immediately reminded of the sad spectacle of our ignominy and corruption, ever since we fell from our original in the person of our first parent. In this way, we feel dissatisfied with ourselves, and

² John Calvin, "CHAPTER I. Through the Fall and Revolt of Adam, the Whole Human Race made Accursed and Degenerate. Of Original sin," essay, in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Jazzybee Verlag, 2012), 218-219.

become truly humble, while we are inflamed with new desires to seek after God, in whom each may regain those good qualities of which all are found to be utterly destitute.³

Sin alienates man from God. God cannot tolerate sin due to how Holy He is. God, however, did not let His good creation be severed from Him forever. God continued to speak and deal with humanity, even after we'd grieved Him and alienated ourselves from Him. God provided opportunities for mankind to get back in fellowship with Him and to inherit eternal life. As a result of the sorrow caused by the effects of sin on creation, man craves and desires a relationship with God. Man will sometimes try to fill this void through other things, but ultimately desires to have the satisfaction and joy God intended us to have.

True and lasting happiness

God is the omniscient, omnibenevolent creator of the universe. God is far greater in His thinking than humanity could ever comprehend. Isaiah 55:8 says

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.⁴

As a result of this, it would seem logical that God knows what is good for humanity, even allowing us to know what is true joy. Aquinas says

The ultimate and perfect human happiness can only be found in the vision of the divine essence. (...) For perfect happiness, therefore, it is necessary that the human person grasp the very essence of the First Cause. It will achieve its happiness, therefore, through a union with God as its object, in whom alone human happiness consists, as we have said.⁵

³ John Calvin, “CHAPTER I. Through the Fall and Revolt of Adam, the Whole Human Race made Accursed and Degenerate. Of Original sin,” essay, in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Jazzybee Verlag, 2012), 218-219.

⁴ Isaiah 55:8 (NIV)

⁵ Thomas Aquinas and Steven E. Baldner, “Chapter 4: Ethics,” essay, in Thomas Aquinas: Basic Philosophical Writing from the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Principles of Nature* (Peterborough (Ontario): Broadview Press, 2019), 148-149.

Aquinas makes it clear that God is the source of happiness. A personal relationship with God is what will make humanity most happy and fulfilled. God desires that His creatures are to be happy and fulfilled. He wants to build unions with human beings.

God's Desire

In 1 Timothy 2:3-6, Paul says

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony is given in its proper time.⁶

God wants to have all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. Through Christ we have a mediator who is able to advocate for us through His perfect sacrifice. God desires that humanity does have a relationship with Him, which is afforded to us through Christ and His sacrifice for all. God the Son descended to the Earth and took our sins upon Himself in hopes of restoring a personal relationship with us.

In 2 Peter 3:9, Peter says

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.⁷

Peter is emphasizing that though to humanity it may appear that the Messiah is taking a while before His second coming, it is actually based on His desire that nobody should perish. He wants us to have a relationship with Him as opposed to having multitudes of people perish. God wants us to have a personal relationship with Him, which is very much evident through His dealings with mankind. God continuously has made efforts to reconcile humanity with Him, even going as far as to having His Son pay the price for sin, which is death. God continuously reaches out and wants to redeem mankind in order to develop a personal relationship.

⁶ 1 Timothy 2:3-6 (NIV)

⁷ 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

Adoption after alienation

God desires to have a personal relationship with man by His continuous efforts to sanctify man.

Theologian Jacobus Arminius writes

The first end is the praise of the glorious grace of God, which springs from, and exists at the same time with, the very act of restitution or redemption; the other end is, that, after men have been thus repaired, they “should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world,” and should attain to a blissful felicity in the world to come.⁸

God is building a personal relationship with us through His grace and mercy. He is continuously trying to restore the relationship which is possible and redeem humanity. God afforded humanity the opportunity to build a relationship with Him through the atonement of Jesus Christ. He transforms humanity through His grace as humans continue to fellowship with God. (Arminius)

Christian Perfection

John Wesley continuously emphasized the transformative power of God through believers. God allows us to be closer to Him by walking with Christ. John Wesley wrote

Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having “the mind which was in Christ,” and of “walking as Christ also walked;”⁹

Walking with Christ is an absolute necessity as it is the medium through which God has reconciled man to Himself. It is the only way we can have a genuine, personal relationship with God. As one walks with Christ, they are continuously transformed by His love, resulting in a stronger, personal relationship with God.

⁸ James Arminius, “Disputation XXXIII On The Restoration of Man,” essay, in *The Works of James Arminius* (Library of Alexandria, n.d.), 53.

⁹ John Wesley, “Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” essay, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, vol. II* (Mason, 1830), 354.

A noticeable trend

God has had a personal relationship within many people throughout history. God declared in Joel 2:12-14

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”¹⁰

God is making it clear that He desires people to return to Him. He wants people to return to Him and build a personal relationship with Him. God did not want people to be distant from Him, He called people to return to Him. Acts 13:16-17 gives this account

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country,”¹¹

Paul is highlighting God’s relationship with Israel, He personally guided them and led them through tribulation and continuously was with them. God had guided His chosen people, Israel, through many trials, tribulations, and allowed them to prosper. He built a personal relationship with His people, as He was very hands on in their prosperity and guiding them as they endured.

In Modern Times

God has a personal relationship with His image bearers in modern times as well. As people develop personal relationships with God, it is clear that they are also transformed by His grace.

As one develops a personal relationship with God, it shows that God is personally working through them and guiding them. According to *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*,

Another inspiring finding was that how students view God and rate his influence and involvement in their lives connects not just with relational health, but also with mental and physical health. Our students who reported God as Very involved, faith as Very important, and God as a Close and personal friend also

¹⁰ Joel 2:12-14 (NIV)

¹¹ Acts 13:16-17 (NIV)

reported the highest levels of physical, mental, and spiritual health.¹²

The closer people become to God, it seems to improve their relationships with others, as He is a loving, personal being. God is very much a personal being, as people build their relationship with God, it inspires them to also start to be personal with others. Being close to God affords people the opportunity to understand His grace, love, mercy, and compassion. It is observable as many Christians seek to love stronger, feel stronger, and disciple others in order to help them have a sufficient walk with God. Studies show that God's influence in their lives is important and they report higher levels.

In conclusion, God has made it known that He is a personal God. Many theologians have done a job at displaying it in sermons, studies show that a relationship with God improves their other relationships, and the Bible has made it clear that God continuously has sought to reconcile Himself with mankind. God continuously intervenes in human affairs, makes Himself known, and even humbled Himself to suffer for our sins in order to reconcile us to Him. Humanity is alienated from God and yet God desires a personal relationship with man. God has afforded the opportunity for man to have a personal relationship with Him. God has continuously afforded us the opportunity to know Him personally through His loving grace and mercy. God's love is made known to man. The trait of God being personal is backed by a multitude of evidence. What a wonderful God we have.

¹² Sean Wang, Kathleen Eldridge, and Hannah Parmelee, "Relationships with God, Relationships with Others, and Health: Associations Among First-Year College Students," *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development* 15, no. 15 (2016): 47.

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