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LOVE?

What kind of powerful being is it that created the universe? People have been speculating about that since the beginning, but we could never really know unless that Being had chosen to reveal himself to us through the Jews as recorded in the Bible.

From the beginning described in Genesis, it is clear that God loved man and honored him by assigning him a role, like a partnership, in ruling over the earth. It is also clear that man was given free will and expected to live in a position of love, surrender and obedience to his creator. The consequences for disrespecting and disobeying God were spelled out clearly: *“If you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will surely die.”* Note that God didn't say, “Or I will kill you.” Built into the fabric of the universe, and particularly into our human nature, is the necessity to align with God, the creator of life. To resist life is to choose death.

Genesis 3 describes how Adam and Eve (man and woman, mankind) disobeyed and fell away from their relationship with God. (Don't be too hard on them. You fell away, also, in those times when you willfully chose to disobey God. I can't remember, but I probably did, too, in some little ways.)

God set forth on a mission to rescue man from his rebellion. That is one way to summarize the Bible. His rescue reached its amazing apex when he sent his Son to die for our sins. Why did he do that? How could he keep loving and forgiving us time and again? The Bible explains that God's essence, his very nature, is love. “God is love! John declares.

You and I have been hearing this statement all the years we have been hearing Christian messages.

MISUNDERSTANDING LOVE?

But we may not really understand what love means from God's perspective. The Apostle John knew about love. He even called himself, *“The disciple whom Jesus loved.”* John is the one who taught that *“God is love.”* (1 John 4:8 and 4:16).

BUT (BUT, BUT, BUT, BUT, BUT) there are things that Jesus said and did that don't fit our perception of love. In Matthew 21, Jesus confronts the Pharisees, who were considered the most holy men in their society, and called them *“hypocrites, blind fools, whitewashed tombs, snakes, and a brood of vipers.”* In John 8, written by the apostle of love, Jesus called certain Jews who (claimed) to believe in him *“slaves of sin and children of the devil.”* In the Sermon on the Mount, he warned that *“The gate is broad that leads to destruction but small is the gate that leads to life”* and that at the judgment many who felt secure in their salvation would be rejected and sent away into the darkness. (Matthew 7). And in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, Jesus' warnings about the final judgment are absolutely horrific.

Let's be honest. Can you imagine anyone, say a pastor, saying those things today? And if they did, would you consider them loving? But if “God is love” and Jesus was Immanuel, “God with us,” then all of these words are expressions of God's love. Jesus stated to the apostles in the Upper Room that, *“When you see me, you have seen the Father,”* and he said he did not say or do anything but what the Father was leading him to say and do.

AVERY AND GRACE (I'm not changing the subject)

Glenn and Doris begat Chet (the third of four children); Chet and Marilyn begat Jolee (only child); Jolee and Micah begat Avery and

Grace (the famous identical twins who were two years old on November 1st.) These girls are beautiful and fabulous, as are two other great granddaughters, Keegan and Kellen, way out in Los Angeles. But Avery and Grace illustrate “the terrible two’s.” They want their way. They try to climb up on things and grab things that can hurt them. When they are restrained, they throw themselves on the floor on their backs, scream, and slam their heads back into the floor. (I remember Jolee acting the same way when she was a tyke, so it serves her right. My four children never acted that way because Doris and I were such wonderful parents.)

How do Jolee and Micah treat those little angels when they act that way? Would “love” speak softly to them and permit them to climb up on the table or grab something sharp? Of course not. They say, No!” and remove them from danger. When they bounce their heads on the floor, would “love” then apologize and permit them to resume doing something dangerous?

Proverbs 13:24 says: *“He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.”* But in our society, that type of wise and loving discipline can get a parent arrested.

What happens to children who are not lovingly restrained and disciplined as they grow up? Occasionally I watch the “Cops” show on TV. Sometimes men in their 20’s and 30’s are arrested and while they are handcuffed they slam their own heads against the hood of the police car or against the window when they are locked inside. They have never outgrown their two’s.

There are Christian denominations and churches that teach that there is no final judgment and that hell is an outmoded concept and that they believe in a God of love. Those folks do not believe in the clear teachings of Jesus who taught more about hell than he did about heaven. They do not comprehend that failing to warn people of a final judgment is not loving. *“Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.”* (Proverbs 24:11)

THE PRODIGAL SON WHO DIDN’T COME HOME (Still on the same subject)

In Jesus’ story, the father loved the prodigal son and yearned for him to come home. But he did not go and drag him home against his will. If he had done that, the stubborn boy would not really have come home. The father waited and prayed and yearned until the boy chose to come home. If the boy had never chosen to come home, he would have died in the far country. We all know prodigal sons or daughters who have chosen to stay in the far country.

John also says some things about our love for God. What proves that we know God and love Him? John says by divine inspiration that *“if we obey His word, it proves that we know Him and love him.”* He says, *“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands....The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him.....Anyone who claims to be in the light and hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light.”* (1 John chapter 2) John summarizes his teaching in 1 John 5:1-5 - *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child (Jesus) as well....This is love for God: to obey his commands.”*

Love, in the Bible, is not a feeling but a choice to obey the Son. The “Great Commission,” the final charge of the risen Christ to the Church (you and me), reads in part, *“Go and make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* And what exactly did he command us to do? He tells us clearly in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

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PSALM 29 (A Psalm of David)

(Oh, how I love this Psalm. I’ve read it hundreds of times. It stirs something deep inside me. Please read it slowly, pause after each sentence, and let its words and imagery march into your heart.)

“Honor the Lord, you heavenly beings; honor the Lord for his glory and strength. Honor the

Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the Lord echoes above the sea. The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty sea. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord splits the mighty cedars; the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon's mountains skip like a calf; he makes Mount Hermon leap like a young, wild ox.

The voice of the Lord strikes with bolts of lightning, The voice of the Lord makes the barren wilderness quake; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the Lord twists mighty oaks and strips the forest bare. In his Temple everyone shouts 'Glory!'

The Lord rules over the floodwaters, The Lord reigns as king forever. The Lord gives his people strength, The Lord blesses them with peace." (NLT)

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"THE RETURN OF THE GODS"

by Jonathan Cahn

"LETTER TO THE AMERICAN CHURCH" by Eric Metaxas

You gotta read these two books! Jonathan is surely the major prophet assigned to our generation. Eric, who wrote the biography, "Bonhoeffer," a few years ago, certainly speaks prophetically to the American Church in this book. These are two of the most sobering and important books I've read in many years. I will be sharing some excerpts from them in coming Newsletters, God willing (I'm almost 96, for crying out loud).

Actually, the following article, which is clipped from the August "Charisma" magazine, fits well into a part of the teaching in both of these books.

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WHO IS BEHIND TODAY'S TRANSGENDER MOVEMENT?

by J. Lee Grady

Ancient Baal worship included orgies, ritual prostitution (both gay and straight), transsexual

behavior, and child sacrifice. When you read about what really went on in a pagan temple, you understand why God commanded Israel to stay far away from those practices which the Lord described as "abominations." (Lev. 18:22)

God set up moral barriers to lovingly protect His people. But it's not popular today to talk about moral barriers. We're supposed to nod and go along with any "progressive agenda." If you muster the courage to question it, you risk being labeled a hate monger.

Recently a video resurfaced of a sermon from Mark Robinson, now the Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina. The Black politician, who is a conservative Christian, made some bold comments about the transgender movement during his message at the Upper Room Church of God in Christ in Raleigh, North Carolina, in August, 2021.

Robinson said, "You can go to the doctor and get cut up, you can go down to the dress shop and get made up, you can go down there and get drugged up, but at the end of the day, you are just a drugged-up, dressed-up, made-up, cut-up man or woman."

Robinson continued his sermon, "You ain't changed what God put in you - that DNA. You can't transcend God's creation, I don't care how hard you try." Members of the predominantly Black church in Raleigh can be heard shouting amens in response. I say amen as well.

To question the concept of gender is to challenge God's fixed order of creation. To question whether God made us in His image, male and female, is to arrogantly rail against God's authority. And to groom innocent kids to embrace perversion should be called what it is - child abuse. May God deliver our country from this demonic conspiracy.

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THE SERENITY PRAYER

by Reinhold Niebuhr

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is; not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.

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LIVING IN BROKENNESS

from John Wimber

“I’m not all that Jesus wants me to be. I’m not all that he’s provided for me. I’m not walking in all that I know. I’m trying, but I’m not doing all that well some days. Are you? That leaves me in a broken state - an awareness of, ‘O God, O God, except for your mercy and except for your grace.’ I think it’s designed to be that way. I think we are supposed to live in the constant reality that we are not measuring up.

Even in his righteousness, even under his mercy, even as a recipient of his grace, I can’t walk like Jesus does. I touch on it now and then. I visit it. That gives me hope and encouragement for more. But the reality is that we have to constantly live in brokenness. The way we do that is not by developing some sort of external religious thing that hides us and puts us in a denial process by which we pretend to be more than we are. Rather, we learn to live constantly with the awareness that we just don’t measure up.

But that’s good news, folks. If you don’t measure up - if you *can’t* measure up - then you’re constantly asking Jesus to make up the difference.

I’m not sure that we ever get incredibly better or stronger or mightier, become these great men and women of God. I think we always live with the awareness that we are serving the great God of men and women. Jesus came down to earth. I didn’t go up to

him. He came to the world. The world got saved by a merciful Savior. Didn’t you? And he’s still merciful toward me. Every day of my life I live in constant awareness of that.”